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THE TOWER OF THE MIRRORS

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THE TOWER OF THE MIRRORS

AND OTHER ESSAYS ON THE SPIRIT OF PLACES

BY VERNON LEE

LONDON : JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD
NEW YORK : JOHN LANE COMPANY
TORONTO : BELL & COCKBURN : MCMXIV

THE BALLANTYNE PRESS TAVISTOCK STREET COVENT GARDEN LONDON

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DEDICATORY EPISTLE

To Mabel Price

By an inscrutable dispensation of the Printer, the dedication to you of my former little volume called Limbo, *came to be dropped out of its subsequent editions. The circumstance gave me extreme annoyance when I became aware of it. But the loss (I mean loss to me and my book, of course, not to you) has suggested a gain, the possibility of replacing that old lapsed dedication by a new one, namely the dedication which I am at this moment writing.*

And even if this new volume be not, as I should wish, more worthy of your acceptance, it records, at all events, many more places we have been at together, and some fifteen years' additional perfect comradeship in various remote or close at hand, delectable spots of this, on the whole, best of all possible worlds. And so, to our next happy meeting and sallying-forth together to bring the Genius Loci the oblation of our glad and reverent spirit.

July 31, 1913 Vernon Lee

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THE TOWER OF THE MIRRORS

I

THE TOWER OF THE MIRRORS

I HAVE always been fond of that story of Virgil, when he had turned wizard in the Middle Ages : how he built for himself a tower—whose name survives in a church at Rome—with mirrors whereby you could see whatever happened in the world's length and breadth. This Tower of the Mirrors I have at last seen with my mortal eyes.

It was a gusty day, with squalls of rain rushing down the Forth, and flashes of blue sky. You go up endless corkscrew steps into a little round room, windowless and with closed-down hatches ; your impression of being in some part of an old-fashioned ship carried out by the blows of wind overhead. There is just space to squeeze in the dark between the rough stone wall and a great flat disc, like a circular dining-table, which takes up the whole cabin. And into this disc you look, and, very soon, look with the intentness of a crystal-gazer. For some one has grasped a winch ; the pale, faintly luminous surface of the table has begun to curdle, and you gradually recognize that what you are gazing down onto is, of all unlikely things, a piece of

sky overhead. There are weltering clouds in slow, uncertain motion ; then a rift of blue, and a long narrow gash, more luminous than the sky, fringed, moreover, by something sharper than any cloud outlines. But that this thing which is beneath you, and which is at the same time the sky, can also be the sea, becomes apparent only after a far stranger thing has suddenly become visible, throwing its dark jags across the mirror. It is saw-edged, it is up and down, with here and there a larger jag, crown-shaped or like a bird-cage, barring the light. And as that jagged line slowly rises, like magic fumes, upon the disc, there comes to be added something else, dark and shiny patternings below trembling outlines of roofs and gables and towers silhouetted against the sky ; a sort of inside, as it were, of those outlines. It is, indeed, the inside of a town ; roofs looked down upon along their steepness ; racks of chimneys, and a wide shining gulf, across which hurry black spots, which are men and women. Men and women ! And the gulf is the great castle-terrace, wet with a passing shower, with the whole mediæval town like the tail of St. George's slain dragon, winding down from it. Those streets flicker out of sight ; and other stacks of roofs flit slowly by, with spires and domes. The sea reappears ; headlands and rocks. The town has vanished, and hilltops have slid into view, bare, like tops of Alpine passes, misty green after the plum-colour and orange of tiles and slate. The hills subside, and there is nothing

once more but weltering cloud with rifts of blue and sudden crape of wind-driven rain. Then the curdling ceases on the surface of the disc. There is the click of the winch let go ; a hatch opens, and the daylight shows merely a round table of shiny grey metal.

We descend from the tower of the Mirrors, built by Virgil, as we know, to see all there is in the world. But not on the earth's surface only, nor on this surface which we call the Present. Here our eye can penetrate through the dimensions of stellar space, and the dimensions also, the many-vista'd planes, of Time. On the tower-staircase hang huge globes, slung askew as our world itself is. Also other globes, more marvellous, inserting your head into which you see, figured on the crapy black roundness, that other globe, the double vault of heaven where this, our earth, is spinning. On the tower-landings stand models showing what we should see were the earth to become transparent and display the continents and seas beneath our feet. And other reliefs showing the volcano-cones ground down by the ice, and the estuaries being silted up. And everywhere, on the parapets, the window-sills, the leads, are inscribed signs telling in what direction we must send out our fancy towards the great names of the world. Alongside that clock-tower is the crow's flight to Paris ; a little to the side, by that wind-warped beech-knoll, is Mont Blanc ; beyond it Rome, Athens, all the Antique Lands,

the Pyramids. And the New World is stretched yonder (like a witch's hour-glass) across those crags, where the afternoon clouds are crimsoned.

It seemed fit and proper that the Tower of the Mirrors should have been set up by that modern wizard, a man of science with a poet's soul, in just such a place as Edinburgh. Or was it those mirror-visions which first opened my eyes to the amazing romance of that place? those Princes Street shop-fronts facing, across the ravine filled with smoke of unseen trains, that precipitous bluff, castled like some black Rhine-rock, walls and turrets creeping up grassy slopes, as in Ruskin's drawings of Swiss Fribourg. More wonderful still, the way that wide, mediæval street of gabled houses runs downhill from the Castle terrace (fit for Elsinore) to the Loire-Château of Holyrood; and *there* suddenly ends off in the bare green crags, which might overtop a pass of the Alps. Never was town more closely compacted with its surrounding country, nor country showing its handiwork of volcano and ice and patient estuary siltings: an epitome, in one tiny corner, of the elemental epic of our globe's making.

That is the difference between this geographer's tower and the places where the wizards of Ariosto and Tasso evoked their processions of crowned and sceptred figures out of the hazy past or future: our modern imagination and dramatic sympathy go far beyond such merely human stories. And this place makes me

think of those masterpieces of contemporary imaginative painting, Besnard's decorations in the École de Pharmacie (to the back of the Luxembourg gardens), not merely by the pale, flat washes of its camera-obscura and the steep plunging view over city and seaboard, but also because, even as by those marvellous paintings, we are given the emotions of looking into the immense distances of geological ages, when the ice was melting from the shores of the great lakes, nay, when the first plant-life arose from the subsiding sea's marshes.

That is why I had rather have climbed into Professor Geddes's Tower of the Mirrors, even than into the one which the poet Virgil, turned wizard in the Middle Ages, built himself near the Tarpeian rock, the better to know all that was happening through the Empire of Rome.

Moreover this Tower of the Mirrors can flash a symbolical meaning even into the metaphysical depths of Being. The analogy thereof lets us guess at the universal mirrorings by which all outside things exist as we know them only in the reflecting and refracting mirrors of our memory and our emotions; while yet those mirroring surfaces of our spirit themselves exist, and pivot to receive images, only in that universe which themselves reflect. Nay the symbol may help us to conceive that the mirroring material whereof they are made, is consubstantial with the universe reflected in their facets; and that the very modes of that refraction and deflection

of Reality are but one of Reality's own modes of existing and acting.

But leaving such metaphysics, and passing to practical moralizings, the analogy of the Tower of the Mirrors may bring home to us that, if we would possess the world and its kingdoms, past, present, and future, and not merely our own image reflected in our own wash-pot, we must take the trouble to ascend into towers, and go to the expense of furnishing our soul with as many mirrors as possible, and a steady, well-oiled winch wherewith to turn them in some directions and avert them from others.

II

THE LIZARD IN THE ABBEY CHURCH

France once more, and at length the first autumn morning. The straggling village has that French air of little, close-fisted, *cossu* middle-class; it looks as if inhabited, not by peasants, but by notaries and *receveurs*, each with his flower garden and prize fruit-trees. But a man mending the road wears the characteristic white shirt and French-blue peg-top trousers, like in Besnard's allegorical paintings. And a farm-house has a vine loosely hung over an archway, in a manner almost Italian.

I have been sitting on a tree stump (last winter's floods have thrown some poplars across the stream, uprooted) by the river Serein; Serenus, the monks of the abbey called him, or the Romans before them, and they named him well: pale jade water moving slowly under pollard willows, between rustling poplars, into whose greyish-green autumn is mingling the first yellow. And serene also is this country of the Burgundian marches: the sweep of low horizon under a pale sunny sky, enfolding in luminous mists the vast plains, the whole

great continent one feels unseen beyond. The wind in the poplars mimics a missing weir. A flock of geese rise from the stream, shake wings, and disappear in the grass; and some ducks are moored, asleep, where the fallen trees have dammed and deepened the current.

Up there, beyond the scrubby apple-trees on the stubble, and the low vineyards, rises the white hulk of the Abbey church, like a huge prowless ship, keel upwards. Of that great Burgundian monastery—nay, of those four great Cistercian foundations: Citeaux and Clairvaux and Morimont and Pontigny—it alone remains intact, itself vast as a cathedral. It, and the huge monastic granary; and, beyond the orchard, some Louis XV. pavilions, on what must once have been the monastery's fortified walls. With their steep roofs velveted over with moss and long bright windows and dainty shallow fireplaces in the panelled rooms, their terraces and balustrades reminding you of the places where Dives takes his pleasure in Venetian pictures with dwarfs and bass-viol players and stomacher'd ladies, these little buildings are discreet yet not at all furtive, little *maisons du péché*, one might say, but of sins venial, graceful, and unhidden. One shudders to think of St. Bernard's feelings, if he looks down upon these only remaining habitations of his Cistercians! But facing their eighteenth-century windows, at the end of a neglected avenue of lime-trees, looms the tall white gauntness of the abbey-

church and the penthouse of its narthex. *That* has not altered since St. Bernard saw it, and must have seen in it the expression of his austere and poetic ardour.

That great white church! Entering from the narthex, or vestibule, into its soaring emptiness, the stillness of the place, the up-lift of those congregated columns, the fugued vistas of the pointed, turning aisles and choir, catch at one's heart and make the breath stop. The autumn sunlight lies in broad gashes across the pale pure gloom; and in it flit the shadows of the swallows gathering round the roof and turrets outside. Conformably to St. Bernard's austerity, which growled and railed at the splendours of the neighbouring abbey of Vézelay, this church of Pontigny is totally unadorned. The outside is in truth little more than a colossal barn, the buttressed apse even having but little shape, the narthex being but a huge shed, and the only beauty about the thing being the work of Time, which has tarnished its whiteness to silver. St. Bernard wanted a mere shell for the human souls within. But where there is soul, there will needs be art, whether saints like it or not. And the Gothic art of the thirteenth century, sternly forbidden the sculpture which sprouts like vine and ivy in these Burgundian valleys, shaped that bleak bare church-emptiness into a figure more divine than any of its sculptors ever carved in the image of man. There is now a crucified Christ over the rood-

screen ; and a saint, a saint great, Edmund of Canterbury, lies enshrined in the high altar. But these are poor, paltry excuses ! The real divinity is the white, vast emptiness itself, the pale sunlight gathered up into great clustered pillars and bent like beech-wood into hooped white vaultings ; the building is a phantom, a dead and haunting Godhead who draws you to his secret heart.

Nowadays it has become the parish church of a tiny village, half of whose inhabitants are unbelievers, and I had never found it otherwise than empty. But Sunday afternoon, wandering around, I thought I heard sounds issuing faintly. And, pushing the door from the narthex, I was met by the voice of the church. It was only a dozen schoolboys and villagers, in shabby holiday finery, occupying a few of the oak stalls which some seventeenth-century abbot, forgetful of St. Bernard, ornamented with cherubs and garlands. These people and the priest were singing, and it could scarcely be called music. But, as I stood in the door, the chaunts in their archaic nakedness seemed the voice of the nude white building, the audible chorus adding a part to the visible counterpoint of the many-vista'd piers and vaultings.

The following morning, when the abbey church was once more deserted, I spent most of my time there in dealings with a lizard. I found it between the steps leading down from the narthex

and the first pier of the left aisle, lying against the stone wainscoting, a flattish brown thing, which I took at first for one of those creatures haunting old masonry, and falsely called tarantula in Italy, where they are reputed to be venomous. I expected it to disappear into some hole, and prodded it idly to hasten its retreat. But it moved slowly, stopping to take note of possible crannies, without making for any one of them. Then I noticed that it had caught its hind legs and tail in a kind of string hindering its progress, trying to loosen which I became aware that the creature was wrapped round and trammelled by a mantle of dusty cobwebs. It proved to be a field lizard, greenish, which must have entered on Sunday while the doors stood open, and was now vainly seeking an exit. I pushed it slowly in the direction of the door, which I had set ajar ; and then, seeing its inability to get up the two steps into the narthex, and, indeed, its utter weariness, I took it in my handkerchief and set it down in the grass outside. But whether from fright, or fatigue, or the clinging wrapper of clerical cobwebs, the poor little brute, Apollo's nimble playfellow (for the Praxitelian Sauroktonos is not slaying, only taming it with his pipings !), merely slipped behind some weeds and lay there like dead. This morning, however, returning to the church, I turned the grass over without finding a trace of it, so I hope that it washed the monastic foulness off in the dew and returned to the vineyards ; unless,

indeed, it was put to death mercifully by one of the swallows in their autumn hoverings.

The day, which after that radiant morning had become covered and sad, is ending with a clear sky once more. The vapours have dropped back on to the horizon faintly reddened by the invisible sunset. From the river meadows and the stubblefields rise white gauzes of mist, in which mingles the smoke of supper and of burning weeds. Above a red farm-roof, the moon, nearly full, floats white in the thin blue air. The great abbey church seems asleep, its high brown roof and turrets and buttresses unsubstantial among the poplars. An hour hence it will have vanished back into the distant ages.

III

FRENCH ROADS

THESE wonderful French roads! They run as straight as a ruler could make them, across high-lying plains and up and down steep coteaux, barely swerving in the little valleys where grass and willows steep in the wide flush rivers. These great, smooth, white roads look as if they had been made not for real armies but rather for the *promenades militaires* of Louis XIV, with his glass-coachfuls of mistresses and courtiers, his camp-following of cooks and poets. And the villages along these roads have evidently been their consequence, not their cause: single lines of neat, low white houses, silvery-slated and attick'd, like so many stables and *communs* of châteaux set along the straight white road at the right distance for coaching relays; the king's highway leaving unnoticed, unhelped, and far off, heaven knows where inland (hidden in woods and orchards) the real villages which had been there before its day, and which, in less monarchical countries, captured the roads and made them twist about in their service. Indeed, these roadside villages of Touraine, Poitou, and Maine, vine-draped or hedged with

old, old planes, are mostly churchless, and look like straggling rows of seigneurial stables, prolongations of the post-house.

These thoughts recurred to me as we motored from Tours to Le Mans. Our object was to see Wilbur Wright fly, and we did : a colossal locust rising from the sand and grass of a great manœuvring field, amidst pine and gorse and dry heather, and flying, a steady whirring flight, at the tree-tops' height for half an afternoon, till the sun had set, and the mists began to rise. There were lots of red-legged officers, and the line was kept by dragoons in shabby undress on ill-groomed beasts, as if a real campaign was going on. Is it true, I wondered, as is thought by some of my Utopian friends, that this grasshopper of metal and canvas and a human heart is destined to flout and rout, to banish into an improbable barbarous past, the armies and navies of the world, all that multitudinous apparatus for murder and wastefulness ? The solitary, silent, soaring thing making the odds equal at last between the small States and the large, the rich and the poor, giving victory to skill and pluck alone, and abolishing warfare by the mere threat of destruction raining down from its wings ?

I repeated it all to myself. But I was tired and footsore ; the whirring locust flight became monotonous, and, being so near the ground, and always in a circle, suggested a wire, something inevitable and, literally, terre-à-terre, without

any of the adventurous appeal of a balloon. The future, represented by the aeroplane, ceased to attract my fancy. And I confess to having felt a certain bitterness when we drove into Le Mans to buy petrol and *carbure*, and the great portals and flying buttresses of the Cathedral loomed in the evening, at having spent my afternoon looking at Wilbur Wright instead of at the soap-bubble clusters of chapels, the elephantine Norman nave, and the wonderful tartan glass, whose scarlet and green and inky purple shone wonderful in my memory. The Future ! Yes, it will be agreeably free from abuses and atrocities ; at least, one hopes so. But will it ever build things like a great Gothic church, or know, or care, how to make such windows ?

Maybe my lack of optimism was due to lack of tea. I need scarcely say that we got none. Few things are more significant of the difference between the Latin mind and the Teutonic than this carelessness of afternoon refreshment. I had forgotten the fact, and had, as a sense of sinking and pessimism warned me, brought with me some feeble Anglo-Saxon expectation of a kind of improvised race-stand (for we came furnished with tickets), not without tea-tents ; or, in default of this, of some basket presently to be drawn from the motor's secret places. But, although the skirt of the pine-woods was strewn with horrible old papers, and there was a show of *buvettes* on wheels for cyclists and foot-

passengers from Le Mans, all that we got—or that I got through the enterprising pity of one of my French friends—was a chunk of dry bread, out of which we excavated thumbfuls by turns as the motor waited for the last whirring flight to end triumphantly among the sunset-reddened pines. At Le Mans the inns and restaurants were besieged by people come from every quarter to see Wright fly. So no attempt was made to have any supper, and the only refreshments purchased were, as already said, petrol and wherewithal to make acetylene, which smells like garlic but is, unfortunately, a mineral substance. But my base Teutonic miseries were more than compensated by a tardy dinner at a roadside inn. It was at Château du Loir ; let me never forget its romantic name and comforting substantiality ! For that excellent dinner, with its *civet de lièvre*, its various indigestible French delicacies and exquisite bread, in the long empty room (it was by this time nine o'clock) of an old posting inn, summed up, as a taste or a smell sometimes will, the charm of the long motor drive in the moonlight.

And through the moonlight we drove on, along the interminable straight road, with its bordering vineyards and apple-trees, clear though colourless ; through the little tidy towns, still alight, where the shopkeepers and apprentices were sitting over supper ; through the low white villages, shuttered and asleep behind their rows of plane-trees. White vapours were rising from

the river-side meadows, and the shadows of the road's poplars cut through them as we rushed along. And every now and then, the motor being luckily seized with mysterious indisposition, there was a long halt between the low woods, steeped in moon-mist, and whence came, making a little hole in the silence, the cry of an owl or the distant shot, scarcely less gentle, of some poacher's gun ; the woods, which had met us at noon with warm fragrance of dried heather and belated gorse-bloom, now giving out only chill mystery under the white, full moon.

Tours was dead and black, even the cafés extinguished, as we woke its echoes ; and it must have been close on midnight when we got back to the shining slate-roofs and the pepper-pot turrets of the hospitable Commanderie.

IV

CHABLIS

The name has stood in my mind for the wine which, of all others perhaps, tastes most of Flora and the Country Green; or, rather, whose flavour seems least unworthy of the captivating scent of the flowering vine, such as it meets one, bitter yet honeyed, in the evening coolness after a June day. I had a small glass of this wine for *goûter*, along with certain excellent though austere *petits sablés*, at the tidy inn of Chablis. And once again, as with this same wine some years ago at Dijon (it was my birthday celebrated in solitude by such unused indulgence), I thanked my gouty abstinence for keeping keen in my mind and palate the beneficent grace of such wines as these, and how much of poetry they seem to have distilled.

That was what the name *Chablis* used to mean. Henceforward it will stand for one of the sweetest little towns of a type especially French, set in a landscape of vineyard slopes and pure poplared river, and seen on an autumn day of sunshine, silvery among aftermath, a day fit to give ripening grapes their finishing turn.

Among other sights at Chablis, besides a very

perfect little Gothic church with votive horse-shoes studding its door, there was one object which worked its way deeper into my fancy. It was a mysterious slab, apparently removed from a grave, and set at present in one of the old houses in a narrow blind street. I call the slab mysterious, because, being visibly sepulchral, one fails to understand why it should be where it now is. Moreover, because the name, that of a little boy fifteen months old, *asgé de xv mois* (a cherub's head surmounts the whole), has been effaced by what is plainly the shattering blow of a bullet.

"Ici mourust . . ." remains, and that *asgé de xv mois*, and the date 1569. But why that baby's tombstone, cherub and all, should have been clapped into a street-wall, and why, being thus placed or displaced, it should have been chosen, poor insignificant innocent, as a special butt for Huguenot or Jacobin violence defies my surmise. Neither was I able to elicit any information from my friends, nor indeed (such are one's friends when bent on sight-seeing!) to inspire them with the very faintest curiosity on the subject. "It must have happened in the wars of the Ligue—for you are aware (vous n'ignorez pas, n'est-ce pas?) that Chablis was the scene of an important action between Catholics and Protestants. . . ." There are moments when I enjoy nothing so much as not having a historical mind. What do I care about that battle or siege or whatever it was? What

I want to know is why the poor little boy *agé de xv mois* was dragged out (at least his tombstone) into the public street and there most cruelly shot through the middle, his minute identity destroyed by a villainous bullet.

It was perhaps a furtive hope of learning something about him, or at least a momentary distaste for historically minded friends, which drove me into a book and newspaper shop to look at postcards. The owner was of that lank quixotic type with whom one naturally falls into conversation ; and who speaks as if he had been waiting years for a kindred spirit.

I glanced at his little set-out of faded paper-bound volumes. Among the various almanacks and detective novels and prayer-books, were Tolstoi and Dostoievsky, and, odder still, Stendhal. "What!" I ventured to say, "there are people in Chablis who read 'La Chartreuse de Parme!'" He leant confidentially over his counter : "Madame," he whispered, "there is in Chablis only one person capable of understanding Stendhal, and it is he who speaks to you ;" and added that what remained "de la bonne bourgeoisie" in Chablis was obliged to keep very quiet, because the place was given over—and he looked mysteriously round the shop before venturing upon his terrible indictment—"to what one can call by only one name : *des parvenus.*"

That seemed so much more interesting, and a deal more historical, than anything about the

Wars of Religion. The Bonne Bourgeoisie evidently kept very quiet, as he said, in those mediæval houses round the church ; theirs the grass-grown yards and mysterious lanes, down which the barrels of precious wine must have been rolled over the cobbles. And the Parvenus, the vintners of to-day, live in those roomier houses, barely more modern, by the glassy river and the bridges, and it is they who have the gardens of autumn flowers, and the prize pear trees, and oleanders in tubs, and even *volières*, where stout madame, in déshabillé, ministers to canaries and ringdoves under the towers and turrets of the former walls.

Having crossed and recrossed the place in every sense, always coming back to the same spot unexpectedly (and this is surely what gives such tiny places their intimate feeling), I waited for my friends in the public promenade, where once the citadel must have stood. It is more than the *mail* inevitable in French provincial towns : a grove of limes planted regularly, with water-meadows and long sloping vineyards visible between their yellowing branches. I sat there long, till the sunshine grazed the sedge and willows by the stream. Some small boys had taken possession of another bench, and, wrenching its mouldering board out of the sockets, turned the whole into a first-class see-saw, on which they straddled by turns, munching their afternoon *tartines*, and discoursing shrilly and professionally of aeroplanes and aviation. Perhaps,

after all, it was no Huguenot or Jacobin who defaced the tomb of the now anonymous sixteenth-century baby *asgé de xv mois*, but just such boys as these, between one *tartine* and another, their energies not yet furnished with public benches to turn into see-saws, their fancies not yet taught to soar in space with Blériot and Paulhan.

So much for Chablis, dear little *Vieille France* town, with vine-wreathed pointed houses, and gardens like the stained-glass windows of this country. How lovingly I already look back upon thy poplared stream and the low vineyards of precious wine on thy long coteaux! And what additional poetry will there henceforward be in every festive forbidden sip of thy pale greenish wine, fragrant of fresh-scythed grass and sunburnt aftermath.

V

SOROR ÆMULAQUE ROMAE

Soror Æmulaque Romae. It was inscribed in vast tessclated letters on the muddy floor of the *hôtel de ville* of Autun, where we sat waiting for the concierge to have finished lunch and vouchsafe us admission to the town museum. And let me remind all fellow-travellers in France, and perhaps in other countries, that it speaks poorly for the attractions of a provincial town when you are willing, let alone anxious, to get inside its museum. Particularly to wait patiently while the concierge trifles with his food. On this occasion our patience meant that the morning's exploration had led to the conclusion that the cattle market was about as attractive as anything we were likely to find, the cattle market being on hand in the square at the bottom of the *hôtel de ville's* flight of steps.

Sister and Rival of Rome, for it seems Augustodunum, Metropolis of Gaul, had once upon a time deserved that appellation. At the present moment, as I have said, the cattle market seemed the greatest attraction of this deplorably dull and sluttish little place. Seen from the top of those steps, from the tesselated

floor with that "Soror Æmulaque Romae," it was a compact, vaguely moving mass of white cattle and pigs, and dark blue blouses, sloping upwards to a background of gaudy posters, brown and slate roofs appearing above a straight garland of clipped and faded lime trees; and above all that, against the watery sky, rose the thorny spire of the cathedral, the cathedral's Norman belfries, and a great vertical hillside of dark and rusty scrub. An Italian looking Jesuitic church formed the side-scene, ringing midday from a wooden belfry, alongside of a gaunt *collège*, where, the guide-books tell us, no less personages than Monsieur Napoléon de Buonaparté and his three little brothers were sent to mend their dreadful Corsican pronunciation. On the other side, close to us, a row of red booths was sheltered by some dishevelled plane trees. As the market thinned the stable litter appeared among the remaining groups of unsold cattle and chaffering blue and black blouses; while the place resounded with the massacre-yells of recalcitrant pigs, dragged homewards by the ear. Then the rest of the market became visible, the stuffs and *merceries* under the awnings, the fruit stalls and the spreads-out of rusty iron and baskets, and new or wine-stained cooper's wares; second-hand things, many of them, and telling the poverty of even these well-to-do peasants, as the smear of manure and the screams and lowings tell of their comradeship with beasts. Pigeons flitted across. The fine

steeple, prickly like a blackthorn twig, and the great russet and green hillside added the serene dignity of art and of nature to this spectacle of human and animal life. Decidedly, we both thought simultaneously, it was worth coming to Autun to see the cattle market. But decidedly *not*, we each said to the other, decidedly *not* for anything else ; more particularly *not* for that cathedral we had come on purpose to see.

I had had to admit—all one knows about architecture left no excuse—that the cathedral of Autun, to see which we had travelled three jolting hours in a slow train, was a monstrosity and utterly contemptible. I had choked down a contradictory impression, yes, an impression of grandeur received on first entering ; and I had spent the rest of yesterday's half-hour following my fellow traveller's indignant criticism round that church : constructive logic nowhere, and that unspeakable replacing of the Norman vaulting-shaft by meagre fluted pilasters looking as if tin-tacked under the arches and to the carved romanesque capitals ! And to think that this place was built but a few years after Vézelay, with only a couple of days of walk across the Morvan oakwoods separating it from the mother, the queen, of round arched, mediæval churches ! I meekly agreed that it was shameful, felt more and more depressed at having come to Autun, and expatiated on the attractions of the cattle fair.

But a sneaking wish to see that cathedral

again caused me to get up early and steal out alone to snatch a last hour of Autun before leaving the whilom Roman metropolis for less slatternly and disappointing places. It was as I had thought. That first impression of the church had not deceived me. And once alone with that monstrous building I was free to recognize—indeed, forced to recognize—that the monster had something venerable and which went to my heart. It may have been some trick of proportion—a very lofty church, yet, thanks to its lack of all projections, unusually spacious. Or it may have been recollections of Brunelleschi and Bramante making me unjustifiably lenient to those fluted pilasters and rows of quite unconstructive arches. Or it may have been the watery green light of the stormy day in combination with the silvery stone. Or it may have been the magic of a snatched last view. Be it as it may, this much is certain, that the reprehensible, barbarous building meant more for my fancy and my affections than sundry irreproachable Gothic churches—let me confess it, than the cathedral, for instance, of Sens. For between that long first morning ending in the market-place and this second (and final) hurried visit to the cathedral, there had intervened a melancholy evening expedition to the two great antique archways in the valley; to the Roman theatre just showing its exquisite curve (with evoked visions of Fiesole, Tusculum, nay Delphi!) through the hill-side grass; above

all, just as the sunset was already fading, to the Temple of Janus, a windowed cube of masonry, stolen, you would say, from the Campagna and set among the poplars of a Burgundian stream. That had made me understand from what a vast magnificent Roman city this poor little French town had shrunken onto its hill; and in so far understand likewise the frame of mind of the men who had perpetrated that architectural atrocity of the cathedral. They were twelfth-century Frenchmen, Burgundian stonemasons, initiate into the rules of Norman building, impressed (the carved capitals prove it and the great Byzantine Christ on the porch gable) by the wonders of Vézelay and the other great monasteries of Cluny which once surrounded this district. But these builders of Autun were under the spell of something greater than Vézelay or Cluny; the spell of Rome. Think what that must have been: these words "Sister and Rival to Rome," made real and at the same time mysterious by the presence of those half-buried walls fit to girdle six Autuns, of the two huge gates stranded in the fields, and that temple perhaps not yet stripped of its marble coating. Think of the altars and idols perpetually laid bare by the plough, the pennies of Cæsars turned up in planting vines. How these words must have sounded in men's souls, repeated doubtless by chronicler after chronicler: "Augustodunum soror æmulaque Romae. . . ." Those mediæval masons were, it is true, copying

only Roman architecture, poor at the best, and as it happened of the poorest period ; but they were realizing a wonderful dream, building " in the manner of the Romans " ; and these people who turned the nave of the great church into a kind of Diocletian's palace rather than another Abbey of Vézelay, were, after all, the first men of the Renaissance, elder and forgotten brothers of Palladio and Wren. For this secret reason, perhaps, the monstrosity which they built succeeded in touching me as something very venerable.

However that may be, my snatched morning walk, taken in order to see that church once more, gave me Autun. For even Autun is worth carrying away and keeping in your memory, if only you can see it in some moment of intense receptiveness, in the act of parting which so often reveals all you are loth to part from. I had three-quarters of an hour before the departure of our train ; and having tarried part of that time in the traduced cathedral, I rushed up the ill-paved streets of the uppermost town, a town I had not before seen nor suspected. It was a quarter of fine old houses basely inhabited, yet, for all present filth and avarice, keeping a gallant and gracious air behind their vines and fruit trees, and filling me with the sadness of old French things, which is as different from the sadness of old Italian or English or German ones as one melancholy ditty is from another : the sadness of the centuries of down-

fall and neglect of that great hidden central and southern France whose very names are like the scars of battles. And at the town's top, beyond its pepper-pot towers and ramparts turned to orchards, rose that great wall of dark oak woods and russet beech scrub and upland meadows under the rainy sky. I went watch in hand, turning down or up one dusty road or steep paved lane after the other, snatching view after view, and then hurried down again towards the cathedral. As I was passing it, I was met by the cry and the little piped tune of an itinerant glass-mender. The man carried as sign of his trade a broken glass lamp-shade, and blew on his flageolet as he went. The tune was that of the Bon Roi Dagobert, who, as you remember, " avait mis sa culotte à l'envers." But, in those forsaken noble streets, that childish song of the feckless France of old (admonished by so many saints and sages to breech itself once for all right side out !) became something delicately and irresistibly sad.

VI

THE HÔTEL-DIEU OF BEAUNE

THE concierge of the Hôtel-Dieu of Beaune, by some disorder quite unaccountable in this well-regulated country of France, just happened not to be in his lodge alongside the Gothic porch. But he would be back in an instant; and, seeing me hesitate about looking beyond the vaulted vestibule, "Madame may perfectly cast a glance meanwhile into the courtyard," said one of several bloused workmen who were loitering about, with the gentleness of convalescence in their voice and gesture. So I went in and looked around. The immensely steep roof—striped two exquisite greys of old slate—of the outer hospital building encloses that yard towards the street, with but a ground-floor of buildings beneath its long slant. On the other side are two storeys of stone cloisters, under a high-pitched roof of shining yellow, black, and green tiles, with pointed attics sticking up everywhere, and no end of little belfries and pinnacles, each with its silver ornament, its lancehead coming out of leaves, or its little saint or warrior, like so many carved housewives for the needles of some gentle and dainty giant's daughter.

At the windows were geraniums and such-like flowers; flowers also were stacked in the yard corners, and more round the steps of a stone cross, where a man was trimming the grass. Through an archway one could see the spaliered fruit-trees of a second yard, and, pushing indiscretion a little further, the autumn flowers of an old-fashioned garden. The whole place had the many-coloured trimness of what one looks into through the Virgin's bedroom window in some Flemish picture, and the architecture was of that domestic though flamboyant Gothic of Van Eyck and Memling's heavenly Jerusalem.

As I began by saying, the concierge of the hospital was unaccountably away, and the convalescents bade me have patience till he should return. But he did not. And, to say the truth, I was glad at the moment, and (you will understand why further on) still more afterwards. It was delightful penetrating unnoticed; the convalescents never looked at me, and the gardener went on cutting the grass at the foot of that cross, quite unheedful of my presence. I sat for some time on the stone wall of the cloisters. Near me, in a fine Louis XIV armchair, and looking as if Molière's Doctor Diafoirus ought to be feeling her pulse, was a young convalescent woman, languidly enjoying the yellow autumn sunshine. Then I walked up and down the cloister, attracted by an exquisite fragrance of cooking apples. Smells are often poetical, and

that one was poetry itself; only the very finest apples, handled in the daintiest manner and seethed in the clearest water, could have emitted a smell as sweet, as spicy, as flowery and amiable as that. Only apples cooked in such a place and by such beings as, continuing my discreet promenade up and down, I could catch glimpses of through the bevelled mullions of the cloister-windows. It was a great kitchen, Gothic, but airy. The sun streamed in on the opposite side, turning the whitewashed walls almost the rose colour of the great copper Batterie de Cuisine and the copper pitchers and ewers on the mantel of the vast chimney. There were big flat cooking-stoves with more rosy brass upon them; and there were long deal tables. And round one of these, round something pale, honey-coloured on tin platters, moved a group of women of the fifteenth century: kirtle looped up over many-pleated skirt and high white coif with hanging veil, exactly like the women in the "Life" and the "Death" of Mary. Only these were altogether in white. It was from this table that arose the ineffable fragrance of apple compôte. Or could it have been hot open apple tart? And those who were preparing it looked for all the world like a bevy of fairy god-mothers (but good ones, of course) cooking the dinner which the little princess shall eat when she wakes up from her hundred years' slumber.

The concierge, meanwhile, had not returned.

But that was nothing to me, well pleased to give all the hospital arrases, the Van der Weyden altar-piece, the old furniture, and whatever other rarities Beaune might contain, for this half-hour's silent intercourse with the Spirit of the Place, whose breath that fragrance of stewed apples almost seemed to be. But certain French ladies, come to Beaune from a neighbouring town in order to improve the minds of their *petites jeunes filles* with the sight of historical monuments (their loud allusions to Dukes of Burgundy had been the only disturbance of that place's peacefulness)—but certain French ladies were of another way of thinking; and after sundry fumings with the gentle, indifferent convalescents, their anxiety to see the curiosities of the Hôtel-Dieu before the three o'clock train grew so unruly that they waylaid and apostrophised a nun who was crossing the yard, a nun so old and bent, and so marvellously mediæval in her white habit, that I should no more have ventured to address her than to request one of the leaden saints to descend from off those Gothic needlecase pinnacles and show me over the hospital for the official fee of half a franc.

I think that the nun must have appreciated the modesty of my demeanour; for she not only allowed me to "jeter un coup d'œil" in the absence of the concierge, but, when the other visitors had hurried off to their train, she very graciously gave me alone a whole hour of her

well-filled time. In the midst of this oddly Flemish place (the architecture, the nuns' dress, copied from Flanders, the Order or Society of *Béguines*, imported from the Duke of Burgundy's Teutonic dominions), she was emphatically French, with the sociable grace, just spiced with delicate aloofness, of elderly Frenchwomen. "Cela leur procurera quelque petite douceur"—she remarked on my venturing a little offering for her sick folk—"et ils vous donneront une petite prière"—the two things becoming, as befits well-bred people, a little superfluity gracefully exchanged.

The nun, or *béguine* (since such she was), showed me all over this extraordinary Hôtel-Dieu, where every modern perfection of cleanliness and precision (as in a very admirable operating-room) has found its way without any fussing into the great mediæval whole. It seems specially appropriate that the centuries, and the revolution which have transported the Dukes of Burgundy's tombs into a museum, and hammered off the heavenly hosts from the portals of the chief Dijon church, should have left this hospital untouched, with its furniture, its tapestries and pictures, its emblazoned coverlets, even to the pestles and mortars and alembics of its pharmacy. Appropriate, because this hospital of Beaune, founded by a great layman (Philip the Good's Chancellor), and not by a priest, is a complete example of the joint care for soul and for body which only a slowly,

harmoniously grown civilisation can achieve: the sick folk, in their white-curtained oaken beds, lying, under the gilded and storied vaultings, with their faces towards the great gold retable of an altar stacked up with flowers. Things of former ages. Yes; but when shall *we* be able to provide in our turn and in our way for the soul's comfort as well as the body's? When shall we be able to give grace and fancy to the pots and pans and coverlets of a hospital, food and physic for the soul as well as the bodies of its inmates? Perhaps only when we shall have come to recognize that, for all the rough-and-ready usefulness of professional competition and rivalry, there remains work to be done—the highest work of all—tending the sick and training the young, which requires a spiritual vocation, and should constitute a kind of priesthood, even as it does with these white *béguines* (bound by promises, not vows) of the Hôtel-Dieu of Beaune.

The charm of my visit to this hospital was added to by my recognition in the delightful white Sister of something of the face and manner of a dear old friend; such might she have been, such may she still become. This unexpected finding of accidental likeness will sometimes make us aware of our full love for some absent one; may bring us into more real contact with our own affection and whatever begot it, than does, alas! a year long of the perfunctory intercourse which becomes the routine of so

much of our friendship; the stranger, just because a stranger, being able to give us, with a sudden stab of recognition, the very essence of our love of the absent old friend. I am glad that to the charm of this particular place this little innermost incident should thus have added its sweetness.

As regards the rest of Beaune, I am at a loss whether it is really as delightful as it struck me. Perhaps no town ever was as delightful (and no person either!) as almost any town may be when it happens to show a willingness (so to speak) to meet one's wishes half-way. Now all through this fortnight of return to France I have just been longing for a town which, in more human way, should sum up the delicate kindliness of the French country in this sunny autumn; the town, so to speak, of those glassy river-reaches, those dewy, poplared meadows, and of those gentle *coteaux*, where the apple trees are beginning to shed their pink fruit upon the faded vines and lilac aftermath; of this country of useful plants, of easy hills, of equable climate, where autumn, with its vintage and apple harvest, its fields of turban-like pumpkins and its hedges of blackberries and dusty delicious travellers' joy, always seems the appropriate season. Now Beaune has been this wished-for, suitable town. It is on the flat, nothing rough or difficult within sight; its very bastions are turned to vineyard, and its moat and walls espaliered with fruit trees. It is as full of odd

sudden corners, of unexpected slants of roofs and projections of attics and turrets, as if already in Switzerland. Indeed, it has, perhaps, because Burgundy is, after all, a passage from France to Teutonic countries, not merely that French thing "Grâce," but a beginning of the untranslatable German quality "Gemüthlichkeit."

That particular day Beaune was full of the making of wine and all manner of vintner's properties; for is not its name that of a noble Burgundy, and the names on the stations and signposts those of world-renowned *crûs*? Round the cathedral, among the little old houses which, with their trees and discreet gardens, go in and out with its transepts and apses and look up into its belfries—in those cathedral purlieus there was a rolling of barrels out of outhouses, and the gutters of the tidy little town ran red with rinsings of vats. The whole of Beaune smelt of wine. But not of the heady, acrid fumes which rise up in the porticos of Italian towns and villas, making you think of the mystic passion of Dionysos and the orgies of the dying year. This was a delicate fragrance, a *bouquet*, of wines such as warm the heart and quicken the wits; and of which a glass (I notice how soberly these French folk use their wine) is taken almost as a cordial. Wines fit for honourable hospitality and family rejoicings; wines fit for a "douceur," as the old nun said, for the poor sick working folk, a restorative to the patient, hard-worked

nuns themselves ; wines as fragrant (why should Pomona be disdained by Bacchus ?) as that never-to-be-forgotten apple compôte in the Hôtel-Dieu kitchen.

VII

THE CHURCHES AT POITIERS

The day before yesterday my friends motored me to Poitiers. As happens not unfrequently in my roving experience, this town, while filling me with aversion at the moment, has already become attractive in my thoughts. After England and after Germany, and several years of absence from France, it smote me with the familiar sense that France is already half Southern and wholly Latin; for Poitiers is, alas! Southern and Latin, with its dust and dreariness, its unswept streets, leprous-shuttered houses, and weed- and ordure-surrounded monuments, its air of having done with life centuries ago, and being given over to the creatures haunting refuse-heaps and charnels. The forsakeness and self-abandonment of Poitiers are, heaven knows, Italian; but Italy has ever a dignity and magnificence, the rags are, after all, brocade and cloth of gold. The French provincial towns of first or second order (for there is a kind of small, sleepy prosperous townlet which is wholly different—for instance, Chablis, Beaune, or Montreuil) are, with few exceptions, simply so much dead and dismal prose. Poitiers

more so than almost any other I know. And out of its dreary, dirty dulness rise stranded the strange, inexplicable wrecks of a submerged age of splendid adventure and romance ; the age of Angevin counts and kings, of great crusading troubadours.

Foremost among these strangely isolated splendours is St. Hilaire-le-Grand. It is a vast basilica, with great barrel-vaultings and octagonal cupolas, infinitely harmonious, and with something of St. Mark's in the fugue-like complexity of its pillars and arches. But, unlike St Mark's, it is very spacious, and filled with the blond light of the fine, clean-cut limestone of France ; a great, double staircase, sweeping with a sharp bend from chancel into nave, giving it an unexpected quality of romance. And the many chapels, clustered like bubbles round the apse, prepare one from outside for its inner stateliness and serenity. St. Hilaire-le-Grand stands, in a fringe, alas, of weeds and filth, on what must be a jutting bastion of the rock, the great natural fortress whereon Poitiers is built. The other churches are also at corners of that huge bluff of limestone, draped round with ivy and clematis ; and about them are odd, precipitous, paved paths and blind, walled-in alleys, which are the things of Poitiers my imagination clings to : echoing empty lanes under the gargoyles and great counterforts of the Gothic cathedral, little streets of shops of *objets de piété* and devout books

abutting on a wide place set with stunted trees in front of Ste. Radegonde.

The porch of this great Angevin church is literally defended by a crowd of huckster crones in high white caps, noisily pressing scapulars, lives of saints, and bundles of tapers on one. It was a Sunday, and afternoon service going on. The sudden sound of organ and chaunts made this church appeal to me more even than that architecturally perfect St. Hilaire-le-Grand. A church most human and historic, this Ste. Radegonde, with something of a Shakespearian history-play. Like the churches of Angers and others built in France by the Plantagenets, it has no aisles, and is of delicate Gothic on the top of Norman, with ample windows foretelling English perpendicular; and, for all the purity of its Gothic details, and the perfect French shapeliness and proportion of its clustered shafts and capitals, it has an indefinable quality of England: built by English kings, St. Radegund's initials on the great crowned coats of arm obviously replacing the obliterated quarterings of Plantagenet leopards facing those of the lilies of France. A church, this Ste. Radegonde of Poitiers, which haunts me with the charm of Hewlett's "Richard Yea-and-Nay," of the romantic world of Angevin kings and Froissart chivalry, of an England still Continental and half-Latin, like that of Chaucer; a bit of English history set down in the midst of what is now that most definite modern France.

If Ste. Radegonde leaves such fancies, and St. Hilaire-le-Grand suggests the Cosmopolitan Byzantine world of the great monasteries, similar from Friuli to Westphalia, of those kings of Bayeux tapestry and Naumburg sculptures, with their air of being but belated Roman Porphyrogeniti; the third important church of Poitiers brings to me even stranger fancies. I mean Ste. Marie-la-Grande, squatting or cowering with its scale-covered towers, its sculpture-fretted hide, like some evil beast of mediæval legend, some Provençal horned invulnerable *Tarasque,* in the midst of a market-place, southern and slatternly, like that of Brive or Arles. For this monster, monstrous in its disproportion and its frightful emphasis of sculpture, in the atrociousness of its Manichæan symbolism, is, like the other monstrous sculptured churches of the South of France (affirming thereby that Poitiers already *is* the South) a half Italian thing. Italian of an Italy which may be (I know not which precisely) earlier or later or contemporary, but which stands to this romanesque South of France (Toulouse, Arles, Brive, Moissac) as an almost Hellenic lucidity of waking loveliness to the horror and abortion of some bad dream, wherein all proportions are distorted, and all suggestions turned hideous and sinister; the clear living reality of the Cathedral of Pisa, the little churches of Pistoia, of the Baptistery and San Miniato of Florence dreamed into something odd and terrifying by

the France of Manichæan heresies, half-Oriental Templars, and Albigensian wars; the ruin of the French South foretelling itself in those ravening birds and beasts and charnel-house cere-clothed saints of its façade-carvings, creatures, all of them, fit to haunt battle-fields and the unburied heaps of dead of sacked and burning cities.

As I have said already, the impression of Poitiers is an especially French one, this of a stagnant, sordid, modern town, without activity in the present or traditions of the past, living its dull little life round one or two marvellous monuments of ages having left no other traces behind them. And it symbolises and explains much of the evils of modern and half-modern France. For what it means is the centralization at work ever since Richelieu, the choking and deviating of the country's life for the sole benefit of Paris, and the loss of tradition, of vital organization, in this sterilizing process. But how could France have escaped such centralizing, being already so unified, so centralized by nature itself? These days of motoring have brought home to me as no railway journey could do how one and indivisible this French country is; barely broken by the central mountains, region melting into region, as the great sweeping lines of plateaus and downs, of shallow parallel river-troughs melt into one another from Picardy to Aquitaine. You can travel from Calais to Bayonne without climbing more than such hill-

sides as the horses of a diligence could take by the mere spring of their descent; no winding along precipices, no hiding in gorges; the great white roads run in their leagues of straightness. The very valleys are but repetitions of one another; the villages and townlets—white-wash and slate, *mansardes* and pepper-pot turrets regardless of latitude or climate—lie along the poplared rivers or athwart the fallow cornfields in ever the same position; cool grassy valleys, just enough for the full, shallow rivers; dips in the road where goats browse among fallen willow-leaves in the lush, dewy grass; high-lying billowy fields, with little trees, pathetic and absurd in this vast sweep of landscape; lilac aftermath on the stubble, bands of yellow sunflowers, reddish vines level with the stony slopes; and above it all, above the interminable straight white road, a pure southern sky, fierce mid-day declining into the deep russet of misty evenings. And everywhere the scent, which the rushing motor seemed to cut and drive before it like a vapour, of autumn ripeness, of sun-baked woods steeped in the first dews, of dusty clematis and roadside herbs and aftermath tasting of caraway. France, already Southern and Latin, but always one and indivisible France.

VIII

ALBI

When the train had issued out of the last tunnels of Auvergne, I became gradually aware, in the declining light, that this country was the South, or, rather, that the sky was; the sky pure, pale, pearly after sunset, with the scant black tree-tops lying gently against it, and the hills also, with lovely, and, if I may say so, loving lines. It seemed quite natural to see, passing by Figeac, a good sized cypress.

The moon had risen, summer-like, as we approached Albi, above vineyards, white Southern houses among them in the moon-mist, and presently, rising out of the plain, there was the great hulk and high tower of the cathedral. This Southern impression was continued for the ear. It being Sunday, the population all seemed walking about under the plane-trees of the boulevard, far into the night. There were the sonorous voices of the South, so different from the ordinary French ones; and real singing: a young man's voice, very high, clear, delighted with itself, actually singing runs and flourishes.

I found that Southern town again, but found

it with such a difference! when I climbed the next morning on to the cathedral roof. I thought I was climbing into a tower, the noise of the wind, increasing as I mounted the dark shaft; great gales hitting the building, and a sound mingling with them which was mysterious in that viewless place; the noise, as I afterwards understood, of a weir close below. Opening a door, I found myself not at all in the belfry, but on a balcony just above the cathedral roof, and looking down on to it, or, rather, into it. For the peculiarity of this strange fortress of a church is that the roof is surrounded by walls, turrets, and battlements, so that it becomes something like the yard of a castle. Round the jutting red brickwork of the cathedral's defences rose the roofs of the town, rough, imbricated, of magnificent copper-coloured tiles. Deep below flowed the Tarn over its weir, a wide, muddy river, Tiber-like, with balconied houses and terraces and arches and gardens overhanging it; and, beyond the great red bridge and the cupola'd convents of the suburbs, stretched a country of rolling hills, with thin patches of green among the sere. The South, doubtless, but not the white, lovely South of last night's indistinct vision.

Disappointment depressed me. I had no further use for Albi. So, to cheat my impatience till the moment of departure, I made believe to myself that I wanted to see a Romanesque church at Lescure, on the Tarn; and, knowing

full well that it was not the case, I set out on my bicycle, with a hot, dry, southern wind against me. The suburbs I traversed were of the leprous modern Italian sort. The country towards the dry-looking hills was dull, and not really more interesting for the remark, conscientiously repeated to myself, that the cranes of the wells reminded one of the Genoese Riviera, and the pigeon-houses of the tombs along Roman highways. At Lescure, a squalid little fortified village, I found my way to the wrong church, not Romanesque but early Gothic, with a sixteenth-century Sieur de Lescure as its sole occupant; a little black, damp church, in a hole below the village walls and gateway. It was surrounded by orchards, fig-trees, bay-trees, and pomegranates ripening on their leafless branches, all smelling of summer drought and autumn sousings, a smell only the South knows! The little church itself had the smell of incense and mouldiness which is also Southern; and the village reeked of wine-lees and opened cellars. There was a *fête patronale* going on, garlands and lanterns, a fair and band, and lots of neatly dressed, amiable people about.

I recognized it all as Southern; yet it had nothing to do with my moonlight vision of the night before, and *I had no use for it*. In dull despair I continued my search for the right church, the romanesque one, though knowing I should not care a pin more about it than about the wrong one. And there it was at last, in some

fields above the muddy river Tarn; and, of course, it was walled round by its churchyard, and fast locked, and I could not get anyone to open it. Pretending to myself that I was really anxious to get a view of the pillared porch and the eaves with their carved beamheads, I made a feint of scrambling over stone-heaps and escalading the gate. But in reality I did not care a jot. This little church was certainly one of the few relics of the great Albi of the early Middle-Ages, which gave its name to the reforming sect and the exterminating crusade that killed Southern France for ever. But the great past of Albi, like the boring present of Albi, was of no consequence in my eyes; again, I had no use for any of it.

I sat down on a grass bank near the little church of Lescure, and looked at the yellow river, and the sirocco sky, wondering when it would be time for return to the town, for dinner, for the evening train, for departure from Albi. While doing so I saw some peppermint, growing in the grass within reach of my hand. I picked some. And as the stems were broken and the leaves and tiny lilac blossoms crushed, the well-known scent suddenly filled my nostrils and heart, making everything right, welcoming me to the South, and connecting this dull distant little corner of Languedoc with everything I care for most in the world.

Bicycling back, the grace of things began to touch me: the reddening tattered vines, the

peach-trees and gourds, those Genoese-looking well-cranes and classic Columbaria (with pigeons frescoed on them, as in Italy), the charming grouping of the deep-eaved brick farms, the smell of herbs and wine-lees and dust and summer's heat.

Nay, the cathedral, which had seemed merely hideous and preposterous in the morning, began to be vaguely attractive as it came once more into sight, craning colossal over the roofs and the bridges.

And thus it happened that, after having my meal and packing my bag, I found myself possessed by the imperious wish to have a last look at Albi and its cathedral; and began to suspect that, recalcitrant though I had been, they had both conquered me.

It was late in the afternoon, and, as I ran along the rough back-street, tortuous, and of Southern squalor, the sun reddened the high tops of the dismantled houses and their roofs of imbricated tiles, and, in their gaps, the great fortified pile of the cathedral and its colossal tower, worn, unicorn fashion, on its forehead. I went for a moment into the cathedral, which now, in the dusk, took a quality no longer of absurdity but of sheer wonder, with its high narrow ceiling, where prophets and sibyls loomed in blue and gold constellations, and its immense flamboyant *jubé*, a fantastic stalactite grotto in the subterranean darkness, broken by the glimmer of tapers and altar-lamps. After a minute or two

in this strange, mad place, now hushed into wonder, and a moment also looking up into the huge lacelike porch and the fortified walls, I rushed back down those sweeping stony lanes, to the ogival bridge. For I felt I *must* see the river Tarn again, even if I missed my train by five minutes and spent another night at Albi.

The setting-sun smote the red houses and mills and porticos and arches, red-tiled steps and alleys descending to the river ; and above the red mass of the town the other great red mass of the cathedral : high loop-holed walls, turrets, and battlements, and colossal horn-like belfry ; and made them glow, burn, a marvellous fierce tawny orange, with the muddy, reddish river swirling round it all and over the weirs. This was the South, I then understood, but not the Italian South, which is my reality. Rather the beginning of an unknown and imaginary Spain that I shall, perhaps, never see, but always henceforward dream of : a South with the mad swagger of that cathedral fortress, and its odd, savage look of an unavenged past, with the fierce colour of the orange-brick and the tawny river beneath the great red span of its bridges : a tragic South flaring at sunset as if to tell of some great burning of heretics.

IX

SENS AND THE NUN OF THE BON PASTEUR

I FELT quite certain yesterday afternoon, while I bruised my feet along the cruel pavement, and then, after relieving them awhile in the dreary sand of the *Mail* or promenade, rested at length on a bench in front of the river Yonne, I felt quite certain I should never have a word to write about this town of Sens.

There was as much pride as disappointment in the fact. A writer is always in danger of degrading all life into a search for what is technically called *copy*, or (I believe) even more expressively, "stuff." So it was satisfactory to make sure once more, even if I had made sure quite often enough, that I cannot write when I have not felt, and that I cannot feel because I wish to write. Waste time and pennies on Sens, well and good; but not waste paper and ink!

And yet, that very night I felt there was this much to say about Sens, that I should look back on it with regret, though why is more than I could ever hope to tell. To call it a case of revulsion of feeling will not do: a place having

bored and depressed you is not a reason for regretting it, else we should regret too many places. (Yet, by the way, is there not a grain of queer regret where one would least expect it ?) Neither can the matter be explained by the thought of " never seeing again," for there is no reason why I should not see Sens every year of my life, if I choose, nor any reason why I should choose to see it.

The explanation of this Sentimental Traveller's contradictory sentiments is, I think, humbler ; indeed, humbling to one's fine spiritual pride ; and it is this : it takes a lot of imaginative pleasure to overlook bodily weariness, especially that of feet bruised on cobbles made only for wooden shoes or cloven hoofs, with the additional over-striding of torrential street gutters ; and this amount of imaginative pleasure the town of Sens does not afford. But once that bodily misery over, the mind is free to arrange scattered significant details into meaningful masses, and, moreover, to evoke lacking impressions from memory of other places. It is certain that into this foreseen regret for Sens there have mingled images, even emotions, brought from elsewhere, some of them so remote as the Main wharves of Würzburg, the recollection and the particular feeling of which united with the wide, yellow-green stream of the Yonne, and with the scent of hay in what was once the town moat of Sens, as I sat on that bench under the elms of the *Mail*. And scraps of other French provincial towns

arose, and (for such things are mysteries !) added a grace to the present whereof they had been equally chary themselves in the past. Then there was the feeling of being in France, in the French provinces, once more, with whatever that vaguely stood for. Nay, Sens was getting the benefit of those years of vague expectancy about its town and its cathedral, even at the very moment those expectations were being dismally disappointed.

This disappointment is not, however, without its interest, and, in so far, its pleasantness. There returns to me in this town of Sens what I have felt so often before in the French provinces and has become more precise since greater familiarity with small places in Germany and Switzerland. I might put it in a negative form : these French provincial towns do not, like those, give you illusions about their present or their past. Their little one-storeyed houses, not without the grace of old fashion, with their walled gardens and gutters rushing down in front, may, indeed must, hold their fair share of human virtue and tragedy and charm, since no place is without such. Their reality is probably no richer and no poorer than any other. But the suggestion, let us say the illusion, they awaken in the traveller is that of a mean little life, what the French language means by *vivoter*, whose stingy comfort is unrelieved for our fancy by the romantic terrors which hang about the grim magnificent decay of Italy ; still less by

that almost musical quality (as of a sonata jangled on a table-pianoforte as we pass down the street) of old-world towns of Germany and Switzerland ; let alone the quality—Jane Austen dashed with "Merry Wives of Windsor," of little English places of the same calibre. Here in the French provinces, as represented to me at present by Sens, one feels a certain *cossu* mediocrity, expressed in tidy doorsteps and a most notable display of high-class eatables at *charcutier's* or *patissier's*, but not much for the mind, no bookshops save for newspapers, prayer-books, and grammars ; still less anything for the imagination, like those rustic *Wirthschafts* where Germans partake, among ruins and forest trees, at once of food, of music, and romance.

In the midst of this close-fisted *bourgeoisism* of Sens the cathedral (as is, after all, the case with those greater ones of Rheims, Amiens, or Bourges) is stranded like a huge looming riddle. How did that vast, uplifting, harmonious, mystic thing arise in—let alone out of—all this mean little life of one-storeyed houses and paved lanes overtopped by furtive convent trees ? And the cathedral is utterly empty, as if they had brought it there, after relentless scraping and Viollet-le-Duc'ing, to show to strangers come in motor-cars. This cathedral of Sens is empty, not only of present worshippers—only a couple of women at prayer in its white vastness—but of all signs of former ones ; empty for heart and fancy ; scoured and life-forsaken save where

the immediate Present has posted up time-tables of a cheap trip to Notre Dame de Lourdes, and placed the inevitable plaster St. Anthony and Joan of Arc. What has it all to do with Sens and its expensive *charcuteries* and cheap hat shops and the block-tin utilities and cretonne futilities of *à la Ménagère?*

One feels acutely at Sens, particularly after coming out of that worse than desecrated cathedral, that the religious life of France has become furtive and mean, its churches (like this one) having the status of "National Monuments," boring museums, dreary "reconstitutions" of the past, in streets dedicated, like those of Sens, to heretical heroes such as Abélard and Etienne Dolet. And one feels it sulking and skulking in those carefully curtained houses and in dank gardens behind walls: the great Gothic tower looks, with its bell-shutters and gargoyles, down on to a weedy overgrown orchard, half-visible through the Louis XV gratings of the Archbishop's palace.

But even of Sens, and of such furtive French piety, I carried away an impression which makes them sweet in my mind, as the fingers of a certain little nun, its heroine, had kept about them the sweetness of the roses which she had just plucked for the altar. I came upon her in attempting to see St. Savinien, a very ancient and neglected church at the end of a Faubourg, presided over by the Chiffonier and the Knacker. A nun of the Bon Pasteur opened a gate with

much bolt-pulling. The church, with an old, old pointed belfry whose bells must have rusted for ages behind their great stone shutters, stood among grass and clipped hornbeam hedges; and its damp, bare nave smelt of the flowers on the altars. "How strong it smells of roses!" I exclaimed, looking round, but I could see none in those vases. The rather grubby little nun laughed, with a kind of innocent roguishness. "C'est mes doigts, Madame," she said. "I have been picking some which were overblown, and my fingers have kept the scent of them." And trailing that scent of Persia and Bulbuls she drew my attention to the blood-stains left in the crypt by the martyrdom of St. Savinien.

"When one thinks," she remarked with pious gusto, "that it all happened in the time of Our Lord, and that ever since everybody has been rubbing rosaries against the stone and kissing it, one must really say 'que vraiment la Bon Dieu à voulu conserver cela'"—namely, those gory soilings. What happened to St. Savinien to have his head cut off, she then explained, when he had come to Sens "qui était alors comme qui dirait Paris," to preach Christianity to "ces messieurs."

These nuns have an asylum for girls whose virtue needs safeguarding, and also for those who have none left to safeguard. "You must have diffieulties—des ennuis—with them, ma sœur," I suggested. "Oh, non, Madame"; she answered; they dropped into their place, she

said, and when they relapsed to their sinful courses, they often return when they had enough of them. "Et puis," she added, "il y a le Bon Dieu."

And really one felt there was, in that rude little basilica, its whitewash stained with damp, and its floor eaten by lichen under the pews, but with fresh flowers on the altars, and that smell of damask roses hanging about the little nun's chapped red hands; *there*, among those nuns and their foolish virgins, rather than in that beautiful white, empty stone skeleton of a cathedral, although the evening sun did flare through its great picture-windows as through a bed of tulips and anemones.

And my remembrance of Sens is sweetened by that nun, as her own fingers by the damask roses which she had picked.

X

BERNESE LOWLANDS

The hospital newly built on the skirts of the village, where the big châlets and apple-trees give way to the woods and pastures, sums up many of my impressions of these shallow Swiss valleys, remote from the feet of the tourist. I cannot express the poetry of this little white place, its shining pale-coloured rooms looking out on the beech forests close by, and the meadows, white with hemlock, across which, as if to increase the sense of a closed-in peaceful world, a solitary yellow diligence comes slowly from the village lying brown against the distant belt of firs.

In such a place one really forgets that illness is painful, is wrong; indeed, that illness is at all; one's thoughts (until one has seen the sad arrangements, the boxes of shining knives and scissors of the little dead men's room) running on the peace beyond all telling, the rest in the present, of convalescence. This little hospital sums up, as I have said, my impression of these Bernese Jura valleys; it and the fine old house, containing the girls' householding school: an impression of deep prosperity, of a harmony

of past and present, and of work and leisure. And it is all right there should be electric light in the big cow stables by the eighteenth-century fountain.

I was taken to supper yesterday at the house of the lady who has principally given her village that lovely hospital and that housewife's school, and who has turned the old churchyard into a very enchanting promenade. She is, I believe, the widow of a rich Batavia merchant. Her house is one of those beautiful eighteenth-century châlets, with fine carved front door (just raised above the street, with oleanders and hydrangeas in tubs), fine roofed-over balconies, and fine pale blue Louis XV stoves. It is panelled and ceilinged with white, and holds only the bare necessary of furniture : a sofa for the honoured and abashed guest ; a big piano, at which the daughter played Beethoven and Brahms ; and a table where a very simple supper was handed round by a young maid. The whole thing a translation into modern terms of some interior of Swiss merchants, painted by Holbein ; and the Holbein faces, full of practical thought and of piety, were there also.

After supper we went on to some other members of the same family, in a still more beautiful old châlet-shaped house, called *Scheidegg*, from its original builder, who has left his wife's coats-of-arms in the Grecian gable. This house is not in the village, but on the high road, hedged with neatly trimmed hornbeam, from

Bern to Zurich. Like all the most beautiful old châlets, it is a dwelling-house only in front, where the great roof is tilted upwards in a bow over the windows and covered balcony, while it closes down with brooding wings over stable and grange and byre, whence comes the scent of cows and hay, and where hang scythes, rakes, harness, and where is stacked the winter provision of wood. But in front the house opens into a pillared balcony, and there stretches the little old-fashioned garden, bounded by hornbeam hedges and palings set with urn-shaped posts. At the garden's end, against the green meadow powdered with white flowers and against the round beech-woods, is a little Grecian garden-house. "It was a good place to play with one's dolls," remarked Tante Bertha, the white-haired aunt who runs the farm, looking over that hedge as into her distant childhood. The *Scheidegg* has a servants' hall, all panelled with oak, with a great oak table and bench, two hundred years old by its inscription; and, on a clasp, the splendid family Bible of the seventeenth century. And over the table a neatly shaded electric lamp! This country is conservative and patriarchal, while accepting all new useful things.

The past of this country has been harsh enough, like its winters. Walking round the village, my hostess showed me the place where the peasant-war of the seventeenth century had ended in a massacre of the leaders of

the country folk by the patricians of Bern and Lucerne, to whom they had surrendered on parole. From this my friend came to speak of the Government of Bern of pre-Revolutionary times, when the country was farmed out to the cadets of Bern patricians, to squeeze and torture at pleasure ; when the hay or corn was left to rot until it should please the capricious Landvogt to collect his share into the great tithe-barn striped with the colours of the canton ; and men were fined and imprisoned for not going to hear the sermons of the patrician's creature, the parson. Coming back from the exquisite little hospital, in that village full of telephones and electric light, that Swiss Ancien Régime seemed unreachably distant. Yet my friend's grandfather, whom she had known, had been brought up a bailiff's son, in a Landvogt's castle in the Emmenthal.

Every country has, so to speak, its own interior, where its innermost characteristics are hidden from the careless traveller ; and even these unfrequented Bernese valleys have their remoter *Hinterland.* Yesterday one of those colossal, sleek Swiss horses carried us across meadows and through forests to the high-lying district called, from its one village, the Oschwand. Such high plateaus, existing only in low and worn-down hills (we are here in the offshoots of the Jura), have an astonishing charm of remoteness and *apartness,* unknown to more mountainous districts ; the rivers and the high

roads leave them aside, the valleys and the plains do not see them; and their horizon is bounded by their own slopes, their world closed in by their own belts of forest. One guesses at a race apart, with its own traditions and customs, self-sustaining and self-sufficing; and such there really seems to be in this Oschwand. They have no doctor or parson, only a schoolmaster, whose house is surrounded by five or six fine châlets, with flowery gardens; nor do they seek much spiritual or bodily help in the valleys below, possessing all they want, cattle, a little grain, and even books, much read, out of which they gather their own notions of history and poetry and antique dignity. And if they ever went to church, it must have been to Parson Jeremias Gotthelf, who wrote his splendid peasant novels in a parsonage only some miles away. After half an hour in the Oschwand, one feels as if one had lived for months there; and returns to the valleys below, through gorges filled with saw-mills and along pellucid streams issuing from the beechwoods, with the sense of having been very, very far away.

It is certain that I had an extraordinary feeling of friendliness and familiarity on finding myself again in the valley village, with its processions of cows under the electric light, and its Brahms's variations played in the eighteenth-century farmhouse. It is a good country, this, of rich and well-educated people, who are still peasants at bottom, a country modern yet

ancient, and with so much rusticity in its towns and civilization in its villages. And perhaps the good Europe of the future will be more like Switzerland than like our bigger, busier countries.

XI

LAVATER'S HOUSE AT ZURICH

I TOOK a solitary walk yesterday in pelting rain, through the old town of Zurich ; down the steep little streets behind the cathedral, across the bridge where old women sell cherries and nosegays under vast umbrellas ; and then up to the Lindenhof, a former bastion now-rising green above the city, and wonderfully sweet with the blossom of its formal limes. I had been duly shown the country house on the hill where Bodmer gave hospitality to Klopstock and Wieland and Goethe and the Stollbergs what time this little Swiss city was the true home of the Teutonic Muse (such Græco-German jumbles would not have offended those worthies), freeing herself from French perukes and furbelows and the Three Unities. I had also had pointed out to me, as fitted a lettered foreigner, another house in a widening behind the cathedral, where Goethe had been the guest, in his "Werther" days, of Parson Lavater, universally renowned for lofty gentleness of soul ("schöne Seele" they called it), and for science of physiognomy, whereby Guileless Virtue learned to shun Villainy's eyebrow and mistrust the Vulpine snout of the False Friend.

And now, having walked all alone round that Lindenhof bastion, and looked down into the little orchards below it, and the rushing river, and (even as Turner sketched them) the rain-blotted mountains and lake, I sought again the purlieus of the church of St. Peter, and the other residence of Pastor Lavater, where he was killed by a stray shot from a French revolutionary musket; and where, as my Swiss friends dutifully reminded me, that same Goethe, returning twenty years later to Zurich, walked up and down in the street and turned on his heel, without entering, while poor Lavater watched him behind a shutter, and felt cut to the heart. For what sufficient reasons Goethe committed this particular piece of brutality my antiquarian Zurich friends entirely failed to satisfy me; this much only being intelligible, that Goethe had also written an epigram calling his old friend a scoundrel ("ein Schuft"), and that Lavater, with his pious highmindedness and universally translated book on Physiognomy, had come to mean a "left-behind standpoint" ("ein überwundener Standpunkt"); getting over former standpoints and the people who happened to stand and point there, being, as we all know, a form of godlike odiousness which Goethe sometimes indulged in for better Olympian attainment.

Be this as it may, I wandered under my umbrella up and down the irregular hilly square, where the comfortable eighteenth-century church

and its genteel porches (for Zurich patricians in sedans) stands under big trees on a terrace, Lavater's tomb being in some unaccountable manner clapped into its wall, just opposite the parsonage where Goethe performed that unkind parade up and down. And I thought over "left-behind standpoints" in general, and those of Goethe and sundry other folks' in particular. And while thus moralizing in the summer rain, found myself in front of a bookseller's window at the lower end of that still and old-fashioned and leafy square. In Lavater's times there were no booksellers' windows, because, save for groceries and baked ware, there were no shop-windows at all; books were exhibited on tressels before the door in boxes, and piled—the Lexicons and folios and *Journal des Savans* and so forth—on the shop-floor, for learned men and wits to sit upon, as they discussed the rival merits of Racine and Shakespeare, the Three Unities of the Drama, the Benevolence of Nature, and the Corruption (vide Monsieur Rousseau, Citizen of Geneva) of Society; and here, in Zurich, boasted not a little of all the foreign worthies and grandees who came to visit Pastor Lavater, and corresponded (princes, grand-dukes, poets, and gushing ladies) through years of elaborately crossed letters with the illustrious discoverer of Human Physiognomy. (And to think that Goethe, when he had passed beyond that particular standpoint, declared in a classic epigram that poor old Lavater's physiog-

nomy, *if less of a liar than himself,* was that of a humbug and a scoundrel !)

Those were the bookshops of eighteenth-century Zurich. In the window of this modern bookseller, facing the dear old Peterskirche, with its great trees, were spread out the latest additions to German and European literature and science. There were books on modern art (*Jugendstyl*—what *would* Goethe have thought of these slimy and vermicular patterns ?), on modern diseases, modern vices, on Symbolists and Decadents and Pragmatists and Modernists, on the Mutation Theory of De Vries, on Physiological Psychology, on Aeroplanes and Aviation ; on " Blouses "—the book thereof—" Das Blusenbuch." And, staring in at that bookseller's window under my dripping umbrella, I thought of Goethe, in his travelling-coat with many collars and his hessian boots, walking up and down under the parsonage windows (with poor Lavater and his hurt feelings flattened behind them), all because, having made his memorable journey to Italy, and even, perhaps, to France, the poet had passed beyond Lavater's " Standpoint," marched godlike to new vistas. And it occurred to me : Could but that riding-coated hessian-booted Olympian ghost return this evening, in the melancholy rain—return not for me to see him, but for him to look, over my shoulder, into the window of that modern bookshop. . . .

Inside that shop, meanwhile, there are dozens of books and brochures, one more " docu-

mented" than the other, recounting that silly quarrel, that unkind demonstration before the discarded friend's windows, which took place a hundred and twenty or so years ago; an incident fit only to be forgotten with the year's gossip, but grown immortal, acquiring the emotional quality of the great lyric or drama, claiming brotherhood with *Faust* and *Werther*, and filling with poetry that rainy square as if, instead of a poor trumpery anecdote, I had heard some splendid music issuing from its windows or chords of a great organ from the silent church.

It was that most unreasonable emotion which led me back to-day to the Peterskirche, to Lavater's parsonage, and that bookshop. I was not mistaken, there is the Book of the Blouse, *Blusenbuch*, in the window. Also a good deal about *das Weib*, Woman, in biology, sociology, neurology, criminology, and other *ologies*, still unsuspected in Lavater's days. Moreover, what would have perhaps surprised Lavater even more—although he was killed by a stray French bullet—an enormous amount of literature about one Napoleon. Lavater was one of Goethe's various "surmounted, or left-behind, standpoints," as the German phrase is. Discarded points of view! Why, any of these Zurich school-children, looking as if butter would not melt in their round mouths, will have discarded more points of view by the time it is fifty than Goethe did in all his eighty-three years. Nay,

one might almost say, than Mankind had done between the disappearance of Hellas on the Mediterranean and the reappearance (thanks to Goethe's shifting of standpoints!) of Hellas in the Grand Duchy of Sachsen-Weimar. What manner of people will walk across—I won't say this Peterskirche Square, for that will probably be gone in a decade—but across any other square of Zurich, after just such a lapse of time as now separates us from Goethe's walk up and down under Lavater's windows? All the genius of Goethe did not suffice to guess one of the great changes which have made the world since his time; to foretell that those changes which he did see would involve changes far greater. Fancy, if any one had told Goethe, at the time that Eckermann was his Boswell, that the invention of steam engines, of which he had heard in mines and a few factories, would bring millions of human beings into existence far more certainly than if they had been manufactured wholesale in Faust's laboratory. No, all the genius of Goethe would never have foretold the change in the pace at which change itself was going. Indeed, I wonder whether, for all his genius, Goethe could have conceived *Change* as such, change in the world, as distinguished from growth and decay of the individual man. For his "Postillion Kronos" is but the driver of the little postchaise of individual life. Or, at most, the God of Time jehus a son instead of a father, with topboots, perhaps, instead of shoes and

stockings, flowing romantic collar instead of snuff-flecked jabot, hair à la Brutus instead of perruke—nay, even with side-whiskers adding to manly grace. But the allegoric chariot's occupant is always a mere younger yourself replacing an older one. *Change*, for Goethe, is but the Four Ages of Man as fabled by the ancients and detailed by Shakespeare—playing and hobbling about in the unchanged square by the church porch. Imagine, on the other hand, if, after that promenade at Lavater's, that unkind, self-righteous walk, Goethe could have been led by his own Mephistopheles to that bookshop, and spent a magic hour in it, not, like his hero, in the Past, but in the Future, with some smug "Higher Daughter" ("Höhere Tochter"), shop-girl, let alone some Russian studentess, for a Helen—imagine this, and what a different "Postillion Kronos" Goethe would have written or left unwritten! Kronos, no longer Postillion, but colossal, shadowy Chauffeur, or—shall we say?—Airship Pilot, rushing whole civilizations in and out of existence; nay, hurtling the universe itself from chaos back to chaos. . . .

We hurtled moderns, meanwhile, linger in that old-world square, cling to the anecdote of Goethe and Lavater, that we may rest a moment in the thought of those dear, narrow times when trees were planted and houses built, and poems composed, in leisure and for all eternity.

XII

THE AMAZON ON THE FOUNTAIN

At Zurich, near that same church of St. Peter's, at the crossing of two steep old-fashioned streets, there stands a fountain ; and on it instead of a man-at-arms or some kirtled mediæval virtue, what but a copy of the Polycleitan Amazon ! One arm bent over her head, one breast bare, and her chiton belted-up like a man's, there she stands, wounded or captive, on the stumpy Corinthian pillar above the perennial spurt of water and the stone trough shaped like the hollowed-out fir trunk which serves that purpose in an Alpine village. Rains and snows have washed her to a leaden greyness, as if the stone had turned into metal. The eighteenth-century sculptor has placed a fireman's helmet by her side, and also a dragoon's cuirass. And over these alien accoutrements she stands sorrowing between the high-pitched roofs and the turret windows, above the fountain where, no doubt, the Zurich maids, in stomachers and pigtails, were wont to wash the salad and gossip of poor Gretchen's mishap. Perhaps they wondered at so odd and unblushing a female body (Weibs-

person); and at the taste of some High Herr Master-Cutler or Provost of the Silk Weavers having had her carved out of stone from an engraving brought back from Rome, where the Pope and Cardinals go about dressed like the scarlet woman, and ride in glass coaches with just such brazen hussies, no doubt, as this.

Not a week had passed after my meeting the exiled Amazon when I chanced into the house of that selfsame eighteenth-century dilettante. At least I do not think it could have belonged to anyone else. It was in a place which I shall not name, in order to save inquisitive readers from going there and never finding it; and of which I need only say that it lies about twenty miles west of Zurich. There had been a late fall of snow on the Alps; and in pelting icy rain we stumped to the outskirts of the little town, beyond where a knight armed cap-à-pie sentinels from his fountain column a quincunx of clipped plane trees. Then round the foot of the castle hill, of whose towers and Düreresque rocks and bushes one caught glimpses from under soaked umbrellas; past the gateposts and vases of a Louis XV country house, and in at the narrow passage of what looked like a gabled farm, with great coalscuttle roof and liveried shutters. Then, after groping about in stone passages smelling of kitchen and laundry, we suddenly entered a room: such a room!

It was remote from the rest of the house, and indeed from the world of realities. The faint green light of grassy orchards was filtered through the old bottle windows. And in it shone, unearthly white, the exquisite stucco nudities of goddesses in medallions and cupids dangling free from the ceiling. They smiled upon shelves on shelves of eighteenth-century books, in faded bindings of nosegay-coloured papers. The Herr Doctor lit a faggot of fir branches in the big French fireplace with a helmeted Roman Emperor on its overmantel. The room was filled for a moment with resinous smoke, sweet like some sylvan incense, and the flare struck those long-limbed goddesses and dimpled love-gods overhead, turning their previous pallor (Correggio-greenish from the apple-trees and grass outside) into the divinest rosy blush.

I was just going to ask about the Zurich town councillor who had set up that Amazon above the fountain (since it was evident that this must have been his room) when the Herr Doctor, his successor in that house, looked about him with an air of embarrassment, and said, in that Zurich German which has surely never changed since the eighteenth century: "The ladies will excuse if I now escort them back to their inn. The fact is I have to attend a meeting of Church Elders."

We rose. He snuffed out the flaming wood against the firedogs, turning the goddesses and

cupids a ghostly white above the brown book-shelves. And we opened our umbrellas and went forth with him into the chill, rainy twilight of that little mediæval town.

XIII

THE HORSE AT LENZBURG

At Lenzburg, from my window at the old inn Zur Krone (which, with the carved snake-ladies supporting its eaves and its splendid gilt sign, must have been the halting-place of Goethe, Byron, and Ruskin between Bern and Zurich)—at Lenzburg from the Krone window I saw the creature who will remain for me the embodiment and symbol of what I love most in Switzerland. He was a cart-horse, stately in crest, ample in flanks and crupper, the golden-bay coat faintly creased over the great thigh muscles; a creature fit to carry, in the deep scoop behind his withers, the vast holstered saddle, the huge weight of iron, of some mediæval knight; but now harnessed to a market-cart and standing quiet, the reins loose on his back, while a countrywoman clambered in and out and arranged her load of cherry-baskets.

Had he belonged to me, that horse should have been named after his native canton, Aargau. For, of all the Swiss Lowlands which I love, that canton has the most adorable mixture of milk-and-honey prosperity in the present with a towered and bannered chivalry in the past.

It is a country of grassy orchards (the cherry-trees are full at this moment of pickers), which beech and fir woods sweep with their solemn skirts ; of little towns whose escutcheoned gates and moats turned to rose-gardens enclose great farm buildings, scenting the arcaded streets with hay ; a country where there is neither poverty nor idleness, and, as in that stately eighteenth-century châlet which gave me such gracious hospitality, the housewife will play you Brahms after the dinner she has helped to cook. And in the middle of Aargau is the meeting-place of two great rivers—the Reuss, issuing from Lake Lucerne, and the Aar, which drains the Jungfrau range, proceeding in the united majesty of their deep Alpine waters to swell—indeed, to make—the Rhine. Above the wide, brimful river-bed, islanded with willows, rise rocky vineyards and steep orchards, each hill with its great castle: Lenzburg, Wildegg, Habsburg, towers and turrets and barns and gables, which, for all their impregnable bravery, have yet the sweetness of places where cows are milked and apples packed in crates and children taught to sing *chorals*.

At Lenzburg also, opposite my window at that dear inn Zur Krone, there was a group of houses which inspired my elderly and blasé heart with the fascinated curiosity which certain houses and their inmates have in one's childhood. They were against the castle hill, out of which opened the various floors of the tallest among

them (all eighteenth-century, deep-caved houses), with its terraced garden and long flights of steps. There was a shuttered, mysterious Garten-Häuschen at the other end; and, tucked away behind a row of clipped lime-trees, another eighteenth-century house, long and low, half-seen only, and in its rear barns and farm buildings revealed less to the sight than by the smell of hay and peaceful agitation of satisfied hens. From where I sat I could watch the inhabitants going up and down the stately open-air staircases, appearing and disappearing, only legs and skirts visible at moments under those low-cut limes; and when there was nobody coming and going I looked at a big red rose, run wild and hanging loose from one tier of the little old garden to the other. I sat at the window (the same I saw the horse from) and watched those old-fashioned up-and-down houses as I have probably never stared at any human dwellings since my childhood: lingeringly and longingly, aware that they hid a meaning only for myself.

A meaning only for oneself. . . . This thought has been haunting me of late. After all, what is it that these old Swiss houses and towns stand for? Not really for their real possible living inhabitants, much as I might like them (for I love Swiss folk). Not any romance of former days: I don't feel really interested in Keller's Zurich stories, even that delightful "Landvogt of Greiffenstein" of his,

entertaining in their sere and yellow all the lady-loves for whom he had once sighed in vain. Indeed, I do not people these places at all. Their meaning is, I am inclined to believe, their mere characteristic beauty, like that of music; with, added to it, as words are added to music, the knowledge that they represent dignified, simple living, without either luxury or squalor, life humanely sweet and decent. But what stirs me is the thing itself, the visible aspect and its surroundings, speaking, like melodies and harmonies, direct to my innermost, incommunicable self. And it is this meaning, untranslatable into words, which is the secret of the Genius of Places.

XIV

STERZING AM BRENNER

When we got out at the foot of the Brenner in the morning (having rushed across Italy a whole sweltering July night), I experienced that peculiar delight, as of the overheard phrase of a well-loved song, which comes to me with the first things of old-fashioned Germany. There were the high-pitched roofs and absurdly painted houses—they had life-size figures of Andreas Hofer and of the Minnesinger Oswald—the *Speise Saals,* smelling of beer and of fir-garlands, the ladder-wagons, and the well-tended flower-gardens ; all the items of the mixed poetry and prose of Teutonic countries ; of romance conscious and prized, no mere fluke, like the picturesque grimness of the South.

Then came a day at Sterzing. How astonishingly Germany is Germany ! Here, still on the Italian slope of the Alps, is a little place which has the same features and gives the same emotion as, let me say, Goslar, hundreds of miles North, at the foot of the Harz ; a town which is, so to speak, a whole literature away from Verona and Trent, through which its river rushes but a few hours later.

A whole literature away from Italy. For there is not a genuine old German town in which the story of Faust and Gretchen might not have happened. Indeed, I often think that if Goethe, in his day of rationalistic pig-tails, was able to write that play, and also "Goetz" and "Egmont," it was because in Germany the Eighteenth Century took place, so to speak, among the stage properties left by the Middle Ages. And are not the towns where Goethe spent his youth—Frankfurt, Strassburg, Wetzlar—towns of the Middle Ages?

Of such Faust-towns this little Tyrolese Sterzing is the southernmost. And in its straggling street of turret windows and step-gables, Goethe caught his farewell glimpse of Germany and the Middle Ages, of the Faust-world, as his post-chaise rattled him along towards Italy and Paganism, towards Iphigenia and Helen and the "Roman Elegies." Winckelmann must have preceded him through that city gate with its Imperial eagle; also chapel-master Leopold Mozart, taking his amazing little boy to become a Bologna academician and a cavaliere; also, of course (with due lapidary record), Maria Theresa and her sons, Joseph and Leopold, going to reign at Milan and at Florence; and later on Heine and Mendelssohn must have changed horses under one of those wrought-iron inn-signs, swinging from great gilt eagle's beak or horn-of-plenty, across the street of Sterzing. And before postchaises and romantic poetry and operas, the German Middle Ages, with their

merchants, and minnesingers, and landsknechts, and monks (Martin Luther, Augustinian brother, among them), must have halted after crossing the Alps, at one of Sterzing's welcoming inns and taverns. Those many inns and taverns, quite out of all reason for the little town's size, turn Sterzing itself into a hostelry; only (and this is what went to my brain from the very first minute) it is the hostelry of the German fairy-tale or ballad out of the *Wunderhorn*. The geographical position, which, unlike that of Innsbruck, Bozen, or Trent, does not command important cross-valleys, could not have made Sterzing a place of barter, unloading or warehousing of goods. It must have been just the *foot of the pass*, where people rested themselves and their beasts before or after crossing the great Alps; where harness was mended, mules and horses were shod; and, in more recent times, post-chaises turned into sledges. One understands, seeing the great barns and stables, back-to-back with that single straggling street, that all Sterzing has stood for is, as I said, an inn. It has the cheerfulness, also the lack of reserve, of the place where people are for ever coming and going, or resting in the midst of adventures.

The wayfarers were often Emperors. The German Cæsars must have stopped here on the way to coronation in Rome or to their Lombard dominions. Not merely the pig-tailed ones of whom we are told by inscription at the inn of the

Golden Griffin, nor even Charles V going to the Fugger Castle above Trent, nor lantern-jawed Maximilian, nor even Barbarossa going to raze and sow salt over Milan, nor Frederick II repairing to his Moorish Court in Sicily or Apulia, nor even those Othos and Henrys carved in Crusaders' mail and surcoat in the Choirs of Naumburg and Bamberg. Not only, to my mind, this Emperor or that, but *the Emperor*, who is as legendary a creature as the heraldic eagle spreading his tattered wings and jewelled necklaces on City gateway and Rathhaus porch. *The* Emperor, no matter who he was. Pinturicchio painted him in the Library of Siena Cathedral, in a framework of blue-and-gold constellations and armorial bearings. He is clothed in a tight-fitting coat of cloth of gold, which reaches almost to his golden shoes with turn-up toes; the cloth of gold is stencilled in relief, and the jewelled sword also, and the spurs. His hair and beard are auburn, with threads of gold, divided into plaited curls, like those of Dürer's portrait of himself. And in his hair he wears a crown. He is *the* Emperor; but also the King of Hearts, on the playing-cards and off them. He has journeyed along with his men-at-arms and jesters and monkeys, and he has suddenly met a King's Daughter, also in stencilled cloth of gold and jewels in relief. He has leaped off his broad-cruppered charger, and, running to meet her, has grasped her hand. All that is said to have taken place before the gates of

Siena, and the Pope married them then and there, and a little wrought-iron palm-tree shot up by magic to commemorate the event. But it had far better have happened at Sterzing, while the fairy-tale Kaiser was taking his way south to fetch his bride. Indeed, what could be more likely than that she should have met him there, quite unexpectedly, half-way at the foot of the Alps? And the little, meek Pope, with his stencilled tiara and stencilled dalmatic, would have been to hand, in one of the inns on the side of the stage, ready to marry them off at once, his bishops filing off to the right and the knights and ladies-in-waiting to the left.

But Sterzing must have been the resting-place for humbler travellers also. Pilgrims to and fro must have stopped there, often in sorry plight, no doubt, half-frozen from the passes, or bringing back fever from the treacherous Welschland. It was for their benefit that the Teutonic Knights founded a hospice, building it, on account of the plague so common in those days, outside the town gates, a good mile in the meadows of that flat basin among the mountains.

We came upon it unexpectedly on a Sunday morning walk across the fields: random gables and high-pitched roofs, and green bulbed belfries over long farmhouse walls. There was no porter and no bell either, so we pushed open the door and entered. The hospital, or, rather, the ramshackle old houses constituting it, is set round its own kitchen-garden, among whose

spaliered apricots and currant-bushes there flows a swift millstream of snow water. Not a soul was to be seen except a poor pale woman, ill, and perhaps half-witted, seated motionless in the garden ; and the steps we heard coming down the turret-stairs proved to be those of an immense Alpine dog, like a heraldic lion in a tapestry, who walked disdainfully past us. At last we saw the caps of nuns coming and going behind the geraniums of the upper windows ; and, taking heart of grace, we went upstairs and into a panelled corridor with the nun's kitchen open at the end. One of the Sisters, Schwester Maria Fulgentia, a dear, ugly, little woman, was kind enough to show us over the place. It is now the town hospital and almshouse ; and the successors of the cosmopolitan pilgrims, the *Romei* of former days, are poor Tyrolese peasants, some of them wood-cutters and mowers injured by the fall of trees and stones in the mountains. My German friend talked to most of them, and gave them wherewithal to buy cigars, for the good Sisters allow the men to smoke even in their beds. The place, indeed, was more humane than hygienic, and smelt of anything but disinfectants ; but its humanity was enchanting, and so different from the chill dreariness of your modern hospital. And surely, with its clean beds round the porcelain stoves, its coloured religious prints upon the walls, and flowers at the window, above all with the comfortable tobacco reek all over it, it must have seemed, what not the finest hospital

can ever be, a kindly friendly haven of rest to these poor people. At the end of a great corridor sat two men smoking, dressed half in their peasants' clothes, half in the hospital's white smock and night-cap. They told us they were cured, discharged, and going home the next day. And behind them, through the wide window and over its nasturtiums, the bright green meadows looked in, all white with hemlock and shimmering with poplars, and the bluish slopes of the great fir-clad mountains, like some allegory of serene and sombre life.

But besides the sick and paupers, the old "House of the Teutonic Order" has also a discreet number of ecclesiastic boarders. And, passing along a passage hung with ruffed and corseleted Teutonic knights, we were allowed to peep into the private room of a certain *Geistlicher Herr*, who had a piano and could play, the Sisters told us, seven instruments. . . . And the figure of that clerical worthy, making multifarious music to the sick Tyrolese peasants, smoking their pipes in the beds and passages of that kindly hospital, melts oddly into that of the Pinturicchio Kaiser getting married under the sign of the Golden Griffin; and becomes the centre of the vague fairy-story impressions, homely, romantic, and splendid and funny, which I have carried away from Sterzing.

XV

A TYROLESE CRUCIFIX

"DREIKIRCHEN" takes its name—if a place which is only a name can be said to take it—from three churches which a hermit built, once upon a time, on this huge hillside above the Eisack.

One accepts such a name and such a legend without expecting to see anything corresponding to them; I, at least, never thought there would be three churches, or, indeed, three anything, in this vague Alpine locality. But there they were, close behind the inn, real, but like things in a toy-box, or the knights and castles on a chess-board: three tiny chapels, no bigger than a shed for a goat, and infinitely smaller than the sheds where the cows are milked, clustered together under a steep green slope, each with a high-pitched roof and wooden steeple, wall to wall; indeed, as if they had been folded into one another for packing into a box of child's bricks. The door of the principal of the Three Churches (it has long Gothic windows) stood open; and alongside, by a great elder-bush, is rudely frescoed on the wall a St. Christopher, carrying a minute Christ-child. The next was locked; and

the third, its wooden shutter lacking a plank, one could peer into through a grating—a tiny, forsaken place, two ropes dangling in the middle, painted and gilded wooden saints looming out of its damp darkness.

One Sunday, I went not to Mass, for one dares not intrude upon these peasants' devotions—but to see the country-folk come out. Only the women wore the costume. But all of them, men and boys and women, had for my eyes, fresh from the light-hearted comeliness of Italy, that Teutonic look of sickness and suffering, of being Nature's step-children, depressed and resigned, which Holbein contrived to give even to the full-blooded Englishmen and women of the truculent Court of Henry VIII. So true it is that the national type, I mean as artistically embodied, of a country proceeds from its high lands, even as do the rivers. These Tyrolese peasants, living very scattered in these inclement places, in cottages of mouldering wood among manure-pools, whose women, I am told, strap boards across their breasts to flatten out all fleshy vanities—these Alpine folk, with the silence of months of snow-isolation upon their lips, are, after all, the figures which haunted the imagination of the painters of fat mediæval cities in the plain, Nürnberg, and Würzburg, and Augsburg.

The first time I saw the Three Little Churches it was evening. The mournful St. Christopher on the wall was just barely visible ; the church

door opened on to a damp invisible emptiness. The cool air was full of the scent of the elder flowers, and of the fresh-mown grass through which rush the rills from high-lying forests. A girl, at the inn, was singing some melancholy German ditties to a quavering old piano. The three little weather-beaten churches seemed drawing themselves closer together in the thought of the winter's snows and solitude. And the little conical wooden belfries looked, with the evening sky shining through their window-slits, like the pricked-up, cowled heads of frightened Kobolds. The place stabbed me with the stab of poetry and a gruesome pathos, as of certain German ballads and folk-tales where the headsman's axe makes a leap when poor young Annerl enters, or the head of the dead horse Fallada answers the little Princess from the city gate on to which it has been nailed:

Ach Fallada da du hangest!
Ach Mägdlein da du gangest!

And then, a few days later, I came upon the Crucifix. It was an evening, going to the little waterfall-pool on the way to the Ritnerhorn. There is always for me, I scarcely know why, a certain quality of romance in such a road; a rough paved track, a foresters' way through the woods, with its worn, irregular stones, its look of effort and even of suffering, its reminder of distant purpose, of far-off inhabitants, contrasting with the free, luxuriant life and death of trees and

ferns and mosses and the joyous energy of the mountain streams. At the corner of such a climbing track, where its irregular flags made a sharp bend up a ravine, stands the Crucifix. It stands under an overhanging blackened rock, to which cling stunted Christmas-trees. The great forest of firs and larches is all round, and through it rushes a runnel of pure ice-cold water in a trough of hollowed-out trunks, bubbling and spurting gaily where it passes from one scooped, moss-lined log to another. The Crucifix is in a wooden tabernacle made of blackened boards, placed gable-wise; rough semblance of a house which strikes one in these woods where buildings are so rare. The figure has slipped a little, and hangs forward, half out of the shrine, on its long nails, in a helpless, hopeless fashion. It is very rudely carved, but with infinite feeling in the wasted limbs and sunken-in flanks and bowed head; it is the image not merely of the Saviour lingering in half-death after the hours of agony, but of Man crucified for ages in body and soul, the Man of Sorrows and Acquainted with Grief. One feels that such a work of art (for it *is* a work of art) is the outcome of passionate impersonal sentiment, that of the individual carver merely bringing to a focus that of a whole people. He has felt Christ's agony to be such because his mother and grandmother have felt it so; because in every church, at every cross-roads, since his earliest childhood, he had met images like this one, expressing that inconsolable suffering.

And the elements have helped the sculptor, weathering the painted wood into lividness, shrinking the body and the pathetic crossed feet, blackening the sockets of the eyes, and painting out the trickles of blood with darker trickles as of rust and soot. And the rains and winds have also removed his nimbus, leaving only a stump of it, and reducing the dead God into a perfect image of despised and martyrized mankind. But, on that stump of what was once the halo, I saw fastened something soft and black, which proved itself to be a long-withered rose.

Less than a mile from the bend of that paved wood-cutter's track, where the Crucifix stands in its gable-shaped tabernacle, the overhanging cornice of the mountain has broken off in recent times; and the path crosses two great rivers of rocks, like scenes out of Botticelli's Dante: great, jagged cubes, piled loosely on each other, as if still in the act of falling. They overwhelmed and swept down a whole hamlet which once lay, only a couple of byres now remaining of it, in a green and sunny lap of the mountain, with that runnel of water bubbling and dancing through it in the hollowed tree-trunks. That was some fifty years ago. Perhaps the Crucifix witnessed it all.

XVI

WERTHER'S WETZLAR

I RATHER disliked Wetzlar while I was there, and did so foretelling (as occasionally happens) and almost *fore-feeling* that once my back turned, I should love it. It and its hotel, which at the moment rather gave me the grues, Herzogliches Haus it was called, after some early nineteenth-century duchess (could it have been of Hess ?), who did the Flight of the Duchess (vide Browning) from her Duke to Wetzlar, where she lived in this house, which must have been old, creaky, and creepy already then, refreshing its decrepitude with Empire panellings and beds—mine, one of them—with lions' claws and a classic curve suggesting Calpurnia's dream. Two of the four long windows of my room looked on some stately houses dating from the days when Wetzlar held the Holy Roman Empire's Court of Chancery ; there was a great double-headed Imperial eagle painted on a gabled house at the corner. The other two windows looked on the market booths and umbrellas, the pleasant spread of fruit and flowers in the early hours. And through my back, as I sat writing after supper, I felt the watchful presence of the

Cathedral tower, more and more cypress-like as it grew blacker and less substantial under the full moon. And as soon as I had proceeded on my journey, I became aware that during that evening alone at Wetzlar, addressing picture-postcards and letting my thoughts run idly on Werther and his and Goethe's Charlotte, I must have been quite unusually happy.

The houses of Wetzlar are not merely roofed, but faced, in their tall gabled frontage, with slate of a very light colour, which gives the little town, seen huddled above the sedgy Lahn stream, a dim, shadowy appearance, even in the brightest sunshine ; an air, not of the usual mediæval German jollity, but rather such as befits the shades of delicate, sentimental suicides. And in the moonlight, as I have already remarked, the tower of the unfinished Cathedral, ending by daylight in something like an Imperial crown of glittering slate, takes the look of a looming cypress, a huge sepulchral arbor vitæ. It must look like that on moon-nights from the windows of Lotte's paternal house, with between them the card-table and tea-urn, and the spinet which, you remember, Werther tuned : the two windows at the blunt angle made by that one-storied house and its narrow, paved lanes. Wetzlar, by the way, is full of flights of steps and of such lanes between high orchard walls. One has met such silent, turning alleys in old English towns ; notably, Oxford, with the lime-blossoms over-topping their blackness, and always, for

my part at least, with a feeling of something foreign and romantical about them. And at Wetzlar one seemed to understand why these are the little lanes, walls overtopped by trees, where lovers' departing steps would echo for so long, listened for with loving ears and answering pit-a-pat of loving heart.

One thinks of that, of course, while being shown over the sitting-room of Charlotte Buff's paternal house. All Wetzlar is, so to speak, on a buzzing chord, a *pedal*, of Lotte, Goethe and Werther. But what moved me in the *Lotte-House* was not merely that. It was—I don't know how to express it—the slightness and humbleness of it all; of the little old beam-house, the lodgings or lodge of a steward, you would say; and in it of that particular room, with its narrowing harpsichord shape, low ceiling, and uneven boards. One realises the utter obscurity, smallness, homeliness, out of which Goethe's romance spread its undying wings over the world. Also one feels that there was in that house something of the exquisiteness of that book's style, the same sparse distinction; I should have wished to say, had we not spoilt this charming eighteenth-century word, the same *gentility*. They had delicate and noble manners and feelings, those people whom Goethe has shown us, small folk of a tiny provincial town, for whom that immortal young girl cut slices of bread-and-butter in 1772 or 1773. Their real letters, of which

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Goethe's genius made such plentiful and (to them!) disconcerting use, show it also; and, if we had not read those, the scanty bits of furniture, that tea-urn, card-table, even the mere tall French windows, looking down the lane towards the Cathedral, would tell us that those who moved among them were no thick-skinned clod-hoppers.

After the *Lotte-House*—which is really the lodge of the town residence of the Teutonic Knights—it was evidently my duty to visit the fountain described in "Werther"; and on my way thither, passing behind the little Cathedral, I came upon a churchyard. It is disused, well-nigh forsaken, and its blackened stones and rusty crosses are overgrown by bushes and grasses, the whole place given up no longer to the grimness of human death, but to the kindliness of plant-life, even if only of nettles. Here is buried that young Doctor Jerusalem, the proto-Werther; but his grave, as befits a suicide's, is unmarked. And here, of course, we must imagine Werther himself buried; no doubt against the outer wall, after he was carried to earth (in those last knell-like words of the immortal book) "by journeymen, without a priest."

I don't know by what rebellion against the tyranny of Genius, such as lays hold of one in towns thus given over to defunct glory, my thought was not of poor copy-furnishing, real Doctor Jerusalem, nor of divine Werther manu-

factured out of that dreary little reality; nor of radiant, aquiline young Phœbus-Goethe of 1775; but, very vividly, of this place doubtless holding men and women who had loved as deeply and sadly and radiantly as any of those three literary demi-gods; their lives, even if but for an instant, flushed into poetry by passion. Fleeting, forgotten passion of obscure, unromantic mankind! But without it where would be the Goethes and their Werthers? For are not these the strings, albeit often rusty and jangling, without which Genius, with howsoever a sweeping hand, cannot bring forth its music?

I was in this frame of mind, my thoughts further chastened by weary hours on those uphill cobbles, where huge cart-horses strain round-necked, when I sought refreshment in a *Fein-Bäckerei*, the merely luxurious *Conditor* lacking, apparently, in Wetzlar. Besides, is not Wetzlar symbolized for ever by Lotte distributing not cakes, but bread and butter?

They sold no liquid refreshment in this particular bakery, whose window-full of alien tarts (awaiting their proper owners) had raised my foolish hopes. But seeing my disappointment and obvious exhaustion (it was last summer's fierce dog-days), the people very kindly let me have some of their own coffee, which was simmering perennially in classic German fashion. As I sat partaking of this dreggy but grateful beverage, I entered into talk with the Fine-Bakeress knitting behind her counter.

She was *fine* in the German sense of the word, herself, refined and with a shadow of melancholy in her elderly good looks. Wetzlar, she told me, was considered by strangers from all lands to be highly *romantisch*. She returned to that word in all her remarks, wearily and with a submissive acquiescence, showing that, for her part, she had no use for such a quality. Her tone made me feel almost guilty in having found Wetzlar *romantisch* myself; indeed, having come to Wetzlar for no purpose save finding it answer to that very adjective. So I shyly suggested that there seemed also to be a lot of new houses building, all those nice little villas—*nette Villen*—near the railway; why, even close behind the Cathedral there seemed to be one coming. . . . And such is the sycophancy of sympathy that I caught myself actually expatiating on the attractions of those smug "homes for happy people," as Ibsen's dreadful Master Builder calls them. Nay, perhaps I half felt that *they*, and all they stood for, might be the rare, the wonderful, the thrilling, might possess the dream-stuff quality we call romantic, for the fancy of those whose lot happens to be cast in places such as Wetzlar. But the Fine-Bakeress refused my proffered comfort and went on repeating, with that same sad resignation, that foreigners from all parts did seem to find Wetzlar *very* romantic. Such, methought, is the depression induced in a sensitive nature by the Wertherian moonlight halo (the moonlight of the Sonata!), which,

refracted in hundreds of picture-postcards, guide-books, and remembrance-cups-and-saucers, seems to hang for ever, and even during July noontide, over this little town.

It is odd, after all, I continued to myself, stirring the grounds in my second cup of lukewarm coffee; it is odd, "odd, unnatural enough," as Mrs. Thrale said of the contraltos in the girls' choruses at Venice, that the whole interest of a town of some twenty-four thousand inhabitants, should seem to concentrate in the little drama, which was not even as it is described, of a calf-loving, pig-tailed suicide of nearly a century and a half ago, and the ten weeks' passion of another lad of twenty-three, which did not even end in a pistol-shot, but only in a certain amount of ink, scratched with a quill upon some paper. Very odd! and if you let your mind go round and round it (as when you fall to wondering over the spelling of your own name), odd, and quite unaccountable, that the quill-scratching should have echoed all over the globe; indeed, that it still echoes and sets our heart-strings vibrating to its tone.

XVII

THE GOOSEBERRY GARDEN OF JENA

JENA will remain in my mind as a town of gardens. I don't mean a town of flowers, for of course its neighbour, Erfurt, is the capital of seedsmen (it is visited, the waiter told me, only by "flower-friends," although it is worth seeing for its picturesque canals and ancient houses); and all about Weimar the old spaliered houses are surrounded by standard roses, and on one side of its market-place, just under the inn "Zum Elephant," was a splendid show of carnations and stocks all for a few pfennigs. But Jena, better than flowers, has gardens; indeed, the mere sedgy banks of the Saale and its tributary give it, like Oxford between Christ Church and Magdalen, the look of lying in a park. And having mentioned Oxford I may confess that the thought of it, and also of that other ancient tree-embosomed and water-encircled seat of learning, Padua, enhanced my pleasure in Jena with the sense of likeness and of difference.

The first suggestion of Oxford had, however, been of the drearier sort, when we found our hotel facing the new University buildings; and even

more while we drove through a dreadful Teutonic equivalent of the Banbury and Woodstock roads on the way to the Galgenberg. I have mentioned that dismal excursion into semi-detachment and *Art Nouveau*, in order to remark upon the rapidity with which a locality can turn a book into a classic, merely because the book happens to people its solitude with familiar human figures. For why did we seek out the Galgenberg as the first *Sehenswürdigkeit* of Jena, except for its having been the residence of that imaginary Fräulein Schmidt from whom, a year or two ago, the equally imaginary Mr. Anstruther so fortunately escaped ?

That literary reminiscence having proved insufficient to redeem the Galgenberg, particularly in pelting rain, we had ourselves driven through the real Jena, the little old town, which was gay with flags and the red caps of students emptying their last tankards before the vacation, in front of various mediæval cellars fit for Mephistopheles' tricks upon the Auerbach topers. And then, the afternoon beginning to clear, we had ourselves put down at the corner of the Botanical Gardens.

There is something peculiarly attractive to me in an old botanical garden. But, now I come to think of it, have I ever seen any botanical gardens which were not old ? Those of Oxford and Padua, terraced and vase'd and statue'd, each steeping in sluggish backwaters with willows, occur to me ; and one at Coutance and one at

Dijon. They are all old; and I have a notion that modern botany does everything in corrugated iron sheds with electricity and Röntgen rays, tickling unhappy plants into all manner of topsy-turvydoms and frenzied locomotion. At any rate the old botanical gardens, like this at Jena, with their pagoda greenhouses and little cemeteries of buried labelled plants, seem fitter for Nathaniel Hawthorne's Rapaccini, the botanist who brought up his daughter on poisonous vegetables till she died of rashly eating some innocent lettuce, than for Professor Haeckel. Does Professor Haeckel ever take his ease under those cedars and among the myrtle-tubs and little lotus-ponds where the sparrows bathe? I have my doubts; he probably lives, like Fräulein Schmidt, in an Art-Nouveau semi-detached residence, *nebst central Heizung*, on the Galgenberg; and he is not sentimental.

But I can imagine some other Darwinian in whom science should only have enlarged and irradiated fancy, pacing up and down those gardens sentinelled by the two mediæval belfries of Jena. He would be seeing visions, such as Besnard has painted, of seething fiery galaxies of suns; of sea-bottoms upheaved with earliest mosses and algæ steeping in shallow ripples, and resounding with the distant roar of giant saurians mating in the twilight; visions of the world of ice dissolving into lakes with pile-built villages, where men first sharpened flints and

women first wove patterns out of grasses ; visions also of terrible whirling universes of flagellating devouring creatures in every drop of water or of human lymph. Visions, also, growing ever and anon into those of a pathetic venerable past : mediæval life in those old gabled houses, with Gretchen's pillory-grating by the black church-door, and the alchemist in the turret study ; and then the boom of cannon, the crash of cavalry through the valley, and, in the flare of burning farms, the Rider of the Revelations, the little bilious Cæsar on his white Arab ; with, at his heels, our whole modern times, hurtling destruction-full. And then, maybe, some newer era still, far away, yet to come, with science using its engines no longer for war and grime, but for peace in men's hearts and sweetness of earth and sky and water. . . .

Such visions he might have, the learned man of my heart, as he walked up and down the Botanical Garden of Jena, stopping perhaps to pick and taste some humble pot-herb with a high-sounding Latin name, or some evergreen, whose bitter resin brings sudden thoughts of white temples on Ionian cliffs. Such visions would he have had (and worded in immortal strophes), the Wise Man of my fancy, Goethe, born afresh a century later. For, among my many absurd regrets, one of the most recurrent is that Goethe should not have lived to know modern science, and more particularly its Darwinian developments. Or rather—would it

have been ? the chemistry of the last twenty years. Or, of course, the great modern study of past civilizations and creeds; our nascent science of body and soul ; all that our poets have at their hand, but do not feel as *he* would have felt it !

And mentioning the name of Goethe leads me to the many names, mere labels without dates or further commentary, which are dotted about on the steep-roofed houses near the old University buildings : Schiller, Herder, Tieck, Fichte, Hegel. Here they boarded, no doubt, while learning or teaching at Jena, between the ogived beer-cellar and the Botanical Garden—those who made Germany revered and beloved above all nations, giving the world Coleridge, Byron, Scott, Carlyle, Hugo, and Renan, before the hill above Jena was crowned by a Bismarck Tower, in form half Theodoric's tomb and half money-box, and symbolizing in that grim and foolish shape so many silly shams and ugly realities which modern men prefer to Gothic belfries and gabled universities, and peaceful botanical gardens with lotus-ponds and old, old tulip-trees.

But the Botanical Garden, although it has made me wax a trifle eloquent, is not the garden to which my heart is really lost at Jena. No, nor is it even the "Garden of the Princesses"—*Princessinen Garten*, where the future Empress Augusta and her sister were wooed—little princesses in short waisted muslin and poke

bonnets and sandalled "brodequins," by Royal suitors, no doubt in Hessians and frogged coats, fresh from triumphant entry into Paris; alas, alas! to enter it again fifty years later as grey-bearded conquerors.

The garden which really took my heart and fancy at Jena was a Gooseberry Garden. It is on the outskirts of the old town, along the river Saale, and touches that kind of "Mesopotamia" of water and willows and grass which is fitly known as *Paradies*. There is no show of it from the road; only a delightful deep-eaved, old-fashioned house, with ropes of creepers garlanding it like a classic altar; also a most engaging eighteenth-century gate. On the door thereof stood the name of a market-gardener. So, cloaking our inquisitiveness in a wish for the seeds of certain pure rose-coloured snapdragons, we rang a bell, which nobody answered, and we entered. It was a garden, a large square garden, with Louis XV tool-houses and tubs of very old myrtle-trees. A garden perfectly symmetrical, *tiré au cordon*, like a tiny Versailles, with gallant allegorical ladies at intervals along the hedges: "l'Europe," "l'Asie," "l'Amérique," &c., with attributes to eke out their scant draperies; and in a miniature *rond-point*, silhouetted most funnily against the dark Thuringian fir forest, a distracted warrior evidently singing the gavotte of Gluck's "Armide."

So far, so good. One has seen such Versailles in duodecimo in Germany. But what one has

not seen or dreamed of (even in fruit-fullest childish dreams) is that such a garden should be made not of hornbeam or box or yew, but of gooseberry bushes. Yet of gooseberry bushes was made that garden at Jena! Gooseberry bushes trained into standards, gooseberry bushes clipped into pyramids and parasols and balls, gooseberry bushes drawn out into long vine-like festoons; bushes laden with gooseberries the colour of plums, of grapes, of cherries, of figs; gooseberries hairy and smooth; gooseberries like nectar and ambrosia. Among which keep watch, against the background of fir-clad hillside, those eighteenth-century statues of the quarters of the globe and the seasons of the year.

That is the finest garden in Jena. And the sweetest, in every sense of that word, not only in Jena, but, to my thinking, in any other place whatsoever.

XVIII

THE VICTOR OF XANTEN

To me Xanten meant two couplets of the "Nibelungenlied," and the birthplace and kingdom of Siegfried: a vague, mythological city, where the widened Rhine, deltaing into the sea, would suck in with the tide or spread throughout all northern regions with the ebb, the story, shifting and changing like the sea and the sandbanks, of the Volsung Dragon-Slayer. And, at the same time, a place invested with some sort of Greek quality by reason of its X; for is not Xanthos a chief town of the Lycians, a river in the Troad also ("which Men called Scamander but the Gods called Xanthus"), and, moreover, the name of one of the Coursers of Achilles?

Our first sight of the real Xanten—for there is one—was from the wharf at Wesel; not the timbered and towered Wesel among the vineyards of the upper river, but the fortress holding, with its green escarpments, the bridge of boats across the lower Rhine. It was near the close of a cold and stormy day. Soldiers were hurrying across the bridge towards the garrison town, and the pontoon puffed to and fro for the passage of the

day's last barges, lip to lip with the grey water which flowed over their bright-green gunwhale, with the thick plume of the steam-tug's smoke in front and the rowing-boats leaping like dolphins in the foam at the stern. A wet and wintry wind blew in gusts, curdling the wide, livid river; and showers came and went with the great loose clouds. There had been no visible sunset, only a faint redness revealing it across the low-lying water-meadows and the distant belts of forest. And against this sanguine streak, at the end of that wide expanse swept round by the mighty river, rose two black pointed towers. That was Xanten.

We went to Xanten the next morning. It was still stormy, the Rhine lashed backwards by the north-west wind, and looking almost like an arm of the sea. During the hour's steam down from Wesel Wharf to Xanten the little boat was flush with the water; and the banks, with here and there a few grey cottages and scant trees, and cows in the grass, were flush with it also; everything flat—near, far; only the heaped-up clouds playing at mountains. The little steamer set down its half-dozen passengers—market-women, with baskets neatly covered with rose-coloured cotton—at various landing-stages, with no signs of habitation save an occasional windmill, and finally set us also down at the edge of a field, the beginning of a long Hobbema'ish avenue, with the twin towers of Xanten far away across meadows. And to Xanten we walked along

dykes and fields, smelling bitter-sweet and autumnal with pulled-up potatoes.

Except for the great gate-towers, nothing remains of Xanten's walls but their shape: the little town, like a sleepy animal when you untie its tether, has not stirred from within their circuit. It is not mediæval, like so many small German towns, nor eighteenth-century, like so many more; it is not even old-fashioned in any definite manner; it is just old, old, too old for one to think of when it was anything else. In a way it scarcely exists at all, shrunken to the mere precincts of its cathedral.

Xanten, one sees at the first glance, is a priestly town, with that something furtive, dead-alive, almost shamming death, one might say, of ecclesiastical centres, like Angers or Regensburg. There is a false modesty about it, as of the curtained windows of the canons' houses in the close and of the screen of rusty elms clipped to their height. The cathedral, with its two great Norman spire-capped towers, its grim, colossal Calvary (a bogy perched on the cross of the Impenitent Thief), and its *Chemin de la Croix* of blackened stone, is the one thing which asserts, which dominates, and that most gloomily and imperiously. It has drawn everything into itself, and its inside is quite extraordinarily full of things and of suggestions. There is a splendid carved and gilded *retablo* against every pillar; intricate, inextricable inventions of thorns, antlers, saints, grotesques, and histories, story

on story and wing on wing, each with its shutters painted in close-packed, vivid patches of colour and gold, landscape on landscape, figure on figure, veil upon cloak, cloak upon robe, fur on velvet, velvet on brocade, and pattern on pattern on the brocade itself; gold pomegranate on stencilled gold lilies, embroidered heraldry on fields of flowers; and gold chains and jewels everywhere, as if were you to paint till Doomsday you could never paint things half precious enough for oblation. The choir-stalls are carved above, below, under the seats, atop of them. There is a roodscreen and another roodscreen; a candelabrum and yet another: antlers, thorns interlaced, with innumerable figures poised on them. And above the carvings are exquisite lilac and pale-rose arrases, beautiful knights and ladies with jewelled and embroidered dresses and armour, among closely packed columbines, and strawberries, and martagon lilies, and every other flower; and more tapestry, with even tighter-packed flowers on dark blue, half-hidden behind the high altar. Also, of course, statue on statue, wood, stone, painted, gilded. And everywhere inscriptions and scroll-work repeating the same words dozens of times over. But above all this wealth and profusion, and explaining it all, there is wealth, profusion inconceivable of Bones. For all round the great choir, above the carving and panelling and the tapestries, runs a continuous cornice of blue-and-gold boxes, displaying through their glass sides close-packed

parcels and stacks of Bones: tibias, ribs, thigh-bones, hip-bones, collar-bones, backbones, skulls, all according to their kind, and each and all wrapped in brocade, tied with gold lace, and covered with pearls so shamelessly big that it never occurs for a moment that any of them may be real ones. And when all these boxes had been packed full of such bones, and the boxes crowded side by side along that choir-cornice, Bones, Relics, still remained over (like the less grisly basketfuls of the Apostles), boxfuls, which have had to be set about, all with their glass, their silk and gold lace and Roman pearls, in various other parts of Xanten Cathedral. And all round the choir, and in many other places, the information is perpetually being blazoned out in gold letters on a blue ground that these are the Bones of Three Hundred and Thirty Martyrs collected *e locis palustribus* by Helena, Mother of Constantine Imperator. It is in their honour, in honour especially of their captain, St. Victor, that all this wealth has accumulated throughout the centuries in this great church.

In the church, and even more in the sacristy. After fruitless attempts to bribe a sacristan, who moved his eyes but never his head, after the manner of the Commander in "Don Giovanni," we were shown the treasure of Xanten by one of the canons in person. There were safes crammed with reliquaries, each covered with close-packed ivory carvings, or immense round gems, or antique cameos, or Byzantine enamels; and a

great wardrobe, where the most magnificent cloth-of-gold and brocade and embroidered vestments hung—with all the colours of autumn flowers and leaves, hung so close that you ruffled the splendour of the one in pulling out the other. But somehow the riches of this church are not merely material : it is full of marks of age, stains, worn-down stones, trodden-out inscriptions, carvings fingered almost to shapelessness—full of everything which disembodies itself into vague memories and indefinable sense of sanctity, an atmosphere like that of the withering flowers stacked on the altars, of stale incense, and, so to speak, of bygone generations. The whole cathedral is full of an imaginative colour, like that of those lovely arrases in its choir, faded and frayed into mere silver and pale rose and cinnamon and lavender, with their ghosts of Kings and Queens.

Now, all this wealth of things and of suggestions has collected, accreted, round those horrid beribboned, bejewelled bones of Three Hundred and Thirty nameless broken-up skeletons ! The thought, I must confess, was at first rather revolting, coming, as it did, after a visit to Köln and her Eleven Thousand Virgins ; this great navigable Rhein made freight, it seems, a matter of no consideration, so that the devout could lay in stores of relics, not, as in inland cities, by the box- or reliquary-ful, but measured by the capacity of lighters and of barges !

I bought a sixpenny guidebook in order to get

right those couplets of the "Nibelungenlied" which were unclutchably haunting me; here, moreover, they are, lest you should confuse the middle-high German Iliad with Richard Wagner's epic stage accessories:

Do wuosz in Niderlanden ein edeln küneges kint,
Des vater der hiesz Sigemunt, sin muoter Sigelint,
In einer richen bürge witen wohl bekant
Nideme bi dem Rine: din was ze Xanten genant.

Well, from this illustrated *guide to the seeworthinesses of the town and cathedral of Xanten,* I learned, of course, a great number of facts altogether uninteresting to me, but two which set me deeply pondering. This place, having been the winter encampment of a Roman legion, was called the Colony of Trajan, Trajana, which, owing to the mediæval passion for Pius Æneas and all his concerns, became transformed in time into Colonia Trojana, and for brevity, into *Troja,* Troy itself. But then came the bones of the Three Hundred and Thirty martyrs, and the new name Xanten, from *Sanctos. Ad Sanctos, zu Sankten,* or *Xanten;* you came to see and venerate these Bones, Tibias, Skulls, Hip Bones, Ribs, Femurs, all the osseous fragments of those Three Hundred and Thirty Nameless Ones for whom no individuality could be discovered and no name be required—just *Saints;* Saints by the boxful, venerated and invoked without any need for knowing which was which—indeed, which belonged to one

another and made up a skeleton; *Saints,* just *Saints,* with no other attribute or distinction: that great cathedral being a mere collective shrine, in fact a common ossuary.

But above all this anonymous and, so to speak, joint-stock saintliness of *Sancten,* or *Xanten,* there stands out (the only name and effigy, but constantly repeated) one Saint, to whom the church, the town, are dedicated: Saint Victor; a knightly youth, sometimes in Roman boots and cuirass and tags, sometimes in heavy Renaissance plate armour, such as Götz von Berlichingen and Kaiser Maximilian wore; sometimes in supple Crusader's mail under the long, loosely girdled smock; once, indeed twice (and of this more anon), in such scales from head to foot as to make the erect warrior the counterpart of the dragon he is transpiercing. Victor —that is what the Church calls him. But *Victor* is not a name, it is a title. And who should this victorious warrior be, this beardless knight of whom that church, that town (once significantly called *Troy*) of Xanten, are the shrine. This hero, so well known that his name need not be mentioned, because he *is the* champion, *the* victor—who should he be except Siegfried? One understands it at once, and as if one had expected it all along, when one sees, one after the other, all those effigies of the knight to whom the cathedral is dedicated, the young knight whom each century has accoutred in its own armour, the victor cruelly cut off in his flower,

murdered, martyred, as these priestly bodies call it, by wicked men. "And there, of course," I exclaimed as we passed through the gateway to the cathedral close and looked up at the mailed and vizored dragon-slayer carved upon either side of its arch—"there, of course, is Siegfried."

It is no use talking about Roman legionaries and their centurion put to death by Diocletian in that place for disrespect to the official religion. We know the real reason of it all; the Edda and the Nibelungenlied, let alone Wagner, have told us often enough. He was slain, that young hero of Xanten, not on account of Christianity, but because of the love and the vengeance of Brunhilt, of the gold still lying in the Rhine near Bingen, of the sins of the gods and the destiny of heroes. And we can surely guess, remembering those great wedding slaughters to which Volker the Minstrel sang and fiddled, remembering the captives sent, with the horses and falcons, to accompany the dead chieftain on his pyre, we can guess whose bones those may really be, swathed in brocade and tied round with pearl-studded gold lace, in the glass cases all round the choir of Xanten Cathedral.

Did the priests who built it divert to their uses, and christen with their appellations, the cultus of some Germanic or Scandinavian sun-god, making the Volsung into a Roman and a martyr, as they turned Venus into a Sicilian Saint and Apollo into that Bishop illustrious as the patron of mineral water? Or was there

really some business of Roman legionaries martyrized for insubordination to the official religion ; were there some real *Sancti sanctorum, sanctos,* whose ringleader *Victor,* young, soldierly, and cruelly murdered, the Middle Ages identified with their dragon-slaying Siegfried, the very name *Sanctos* or Xantos, the other name, Colonia Tr*a*jana, or Tr*o*jana, or *Troja* for short, suggesting to the clerks thoughts of youthful heroism and violent death by a river (" Scamander, which the gods call Xanthus "), and thus designating that dwindled city of pilgrimage as the mythical dwelling of the Northern Achilles ?

There seems, at any rate, an odd network of coincidences entangling the thought of this town : Troja and Xanthos and St. Victor and Siegfried. And when the burly Canon, showing us the cathedral treasure, took from the huge safe an ivory Byzantine casket, what do you think he said in pointing out the toga'd and helmeted figures carved on its sides, and which, of course, we connected with St. Victor and his fellow-martyrs ? " This," said the *Geistliche Herr,* clapping his thumb on the delicate ivory—" this, meine Herrschaften, represents the history of Achilles."

XIX

THREE OLD GERMAN PALACES

I

Oranienbaum, "Orange-tree," is a dear little palace, not belying the sweet and scented primness of its name, although that is derived from a princess of Nassau-Orange, who intermarried with these princes of Dessau. Anyhow, the name produced the thing, and Oranienbaum is walled round with great glasshouses, full of century-old orange-trees in tubs; and also it is, for the most part, most daintily and amusingly Chinese; Chinese, because oranges are called "China-oranges," and also "mandarins." Make-believe eighteenth-century Chinese, of course, with pagodas and Chinamen on wall-papers and hangings, and slender, lacquered furniture: a little palace all white and porcelain-blue, and white and nasturtium-colour, like the precious vases and teacups and saucers on the shelves. And outside stretches a tiny park of willow-pattern canals, like those on the screens and chintzes, and yews and arbor-vitæ out of toy boxes. And the only use to which the little

palace is put seems to be furnishing the oranges for a kind of sweetmeat for which Dessau is, it seems, famous: thick slabs of marbly sugar, tasting of *fleur d'oranger* and of the old-fashioned houses where that gentle beverage is placed, in gilt Murano bottles, by one's curtained and valanced bed.

From Oranienbaum we drove to Wörlitz, another palace and park of the most opposite style, but quite as characteristic: hillocks contrived in a flat country, lakes and streams where there is no water; artificial wildernesses, with artificial ruins and grottos; and rustic paths baffling the wearied wish to get along. A place which, in its playing at nature, tells of a state of mind less natural even than that of the peruked people who made the Chinese-rooms and clipped the yews into vases and ninepins at Oranienbaum.

While dragging unwilling feet through this deliberate romance of Wörlitz, I was additionally vexed by the thought that Goethe, if one may judge by the parks and gardens in his "Wahlverwandschaften," would have liked it all, perhaps even tried to lay out something similar.

One can only excuse him and explain such places as these by the fact that our great-grandfathers (when they chanced to be Princes, Electors, or Goethes!) had not yet really the habit of the country; fields and neighbourhoods offending their sense of dignity; and also that their very clothes, embroideries, and wigs, for-

bade their gratifying a passion for Nature otherwise than on gravelled walks, and within easy refuge in a Grecian portico. Also, such a park as this of Wörlitz is surely referable to certain national characteristics, which happened to be dominant in the late eighteenth century. The German soul indulges freely in a kind of imaginative dumb-crambo, a childlike snatching at emotional suggestion, and neglects, at times, the real aspect of things. This makes the German an incomparable organizer of the picturesque (every old German town is there to prove it), a romantic poet and a musician. But the drawbacks of this tendency are such things as this park of Wörlitz in the past, and as the *mise-en-scene* of "Parsifal," let us say, in the present. And as such drawbacks of great national gifts of sentiment and romance, we ought, perhaps, to accept them in a spirit of grateful amusement.

By an odd irony, these two so-differently artificial palaces of Oranienbaum and Wörlitz are girdled round, like the town of Dessau itself, by the very real romance of forests. We skirted them on our return, along grassy, swampy places dotted with huge oaks, and yellowing thickets of beech and impenetrable blackness of fir. It was a cold, clear, autumn evening, with mists rising off the lawns. Everywhere deer galloped across the path. And, stopping to watch the big horned herds at pasture, we heard the call of the stags in the forest; a lion-like

roar, giving a queer sense of remoteness and mystery to the place and hour, and making one forget both the 1820 romanticalities of Wörlitz, and the dapper blue-and-yellow chine-series of Oranienbaum.

II

After the rush, crush, and strain of two days of the Wagner performances, all that crude appeal to a bullied imagination, we had an afternoon of long, leisurely reality at the Eremitage, the meeting with certain dear friends of former years colouring the waking hours into dreams and poetry.

The cosmopolitan crowd had cleared out as by magic, and the wide, wet streets of Bayreuth were left to the scanty inhabitants of its seventeenth- and eighteenth-century houses, and to the market women, presided over with Bernini gallantry by a fountain-Cupid black with the damp of these shallow valleys and the smoke of their breweries. We drove first to the roadside inn called Rollwenzellei, attracted by the thought of Jean Paul, its whilom guest, and also of a particular kind of gauffred cake called *Spritzkuchen,* whose baking revealed itself fragrantly in the little room (with a gallant pastoral on the stove), where you are shown the manuscripts and portraits of the author of *Siebenkäs.* Having insidiously secured a supply of fresh *Spritzkuchen* intended for the farewell meal of

Kundry and several chapel-masters, we continued to the margravial villa of Eremitage. The road ran between great lime-trees, and the scent of their belated blossoms mingled with the faint autumnal smell of soaked yellow leaves and of freshly ploughed earth. It had poured all the morning, and the afternoon was veiled and turned into premature evening by the steaming woods and fields. The park was utterly empty. We mopped up a table and chairs under the dripping limes, and had our coffee, along with the pirated *Spritzkuchen*, in front of the long low line of what must have been the margravial kitchens and offices.

For the two little palaces are as devoid of all similar practical places as the castle of the fairy who was served by invisible hands. They are abodes only of the leisure of princes and princesses and their favourites: semi-circular suites of small, low Louis XV chambers, with supper- and card-tables, of Chinese closets and music-rooms with gold fiddles and lutes embossed upon the panels. The creepers and hornbeam-hedges almost touch the long French windows, and shed a green and cavernous light on to the polished *parquets* and into the darkened mirrors. There is no trace of habitation more recent than that of the peruked margraves and stomachered margravines, who, with their circle of Pompadour ladies-in-waiting, look down from the walls; faces all run to pouting lips and wanton eyes, with that odd look of amused satiety and civil in-

solence, as of so many intriguing ladies'-maids and pandering valets, Figaros and Susannas, which Continental painters of the early eighteenth century contrive to give to their highest-born sitters. Listless, diminished ghosts of mean realities, being sucked, with the sunken-in oil-paint, into dark nothingness! Yet what a grace and a manner they had, and a furbelowed fancy, too—they and the inglorious artists who ministered to their caprices! Round the semi-circular palace runs a colonnade whose pillars are compacted of various flints and copper-ores, of unlikely smoky moonstone, white and turquoise-blue, striped and patterned like a Louis XV silk when you look close; but when you stand off taking the appearances of some elaborate confectionery *nougat* of frosted almonds and pistachios. And in the middle of the building is the domed *Sonnentempel*, where, surrounded by stucco orange- and lemon-boughs, but with the scent of the real orangery coming through the windows, the *Hohe Herrschaften* worshipped their own ease round the now silent central fountain. . . .

The afternoon light, with sudden pale yellow gleams among the long hornbeam arbours and the sweeping beeches and limes, was fading in the little hunting-palace, when the housekeeper led us up to the portrait of the wicked Duchess of Orlamünde, and said: "That is the White Lady."

And that she undoubtedly is, regardless of

the fact that the Herzogin von Orlamünde murdered her children from love for the Markgraf of Nürnberg somewhere in the thirteenth century, if at all; and that this Peter Lely Huntress wears the open-bosomed dress and the frizzled curtain hair of a Hampton Court Beauty. But, in calling her the *Weisse Dame*, the tradition of Eremitage housekeepers is certainly right. And it is she, she and no other, who haunts this palace and all other palaces of the Hohenzollerns, boding them evil.

For her palest blue-and-lilac dress is woven of the cloud-veiled moonbeams of murderous nights, and her hunting-spear is poised in homicidal intent. The eyes look out of the white face, following and watching. And these wicked dark eyes are like those of her mother, whose ruffed and farthingaled likeness hangs in the same room, only their evil look remaining of that blurred and blackened painting. Nay, what is worse, the eyes are those also of a little child—her child?—whose likeness is near the window, so that in the gathering dimness of that low pale room you can distinguish quite plainly its stiff velvet coroneted cap, and the sceptre in its little hands. The baby looks at you with the same dark glance of its grandmother and its mother, *its mother who killed it*. It is those eyes which haunt the palace. One can imagine that in the twilight something which had seemed an old silk chair or shimmering lacquered cabinet, far away in one of the distant rooms

which that circular building allows you to look into—one can imagine it to discover itself to be no longer what you had thought, sheen of stuff or of *marqueterie*, but moon-and-cloud-coloured draperies and a moon-white face.

"But none of these is the room where she haunts. We shall come to it in a minute, if the *Herrschaften* will have patience," says the housekeeper's daughter.

"And here," she resumes after we have passed through two more darkening apartments, "here is the room where the White Lady appeared to the Emperor Napoleon."

A small room at the end of that semi-circular palace: pale-blue walls, deep-green hangings; and in an alcove, curtained and valanced, a narrow bed faded to sea-green. The room was dim in the twilight of the high hornbeam hedges; and in that mist of blue and green, we understood that the truly terrible thing there was not the ghost, not even the White Lady, but that narrow alcoved bed where one would lie awaiting the rustle of her faded silvery skirts, the white vision of her deep-eyed face.

We lingered, we two old friends, in that room till we could bear it no longer; and found the others already far outside, round the basin where the tritons no longer spout, where the sunset rays lingered at the end of an arched hornbeam avenue. Our companions had not submitted like us to the spells of the White Lady; and the children in years or spirit were

trying how one could march to the *Bim-Bam, Bum-Bum,* of the *Parsifal* bells, and rehearsing, in no very reverent intention, the leaps and shouts of Kundry bringing "*Balsam. . . .*"

We drove back through the misty park, and through that long avenue of lime-trees, with pale, unreal washes of ploughed field and marshy meadow and distant belts of forest lying beyond, to where the little eighteenth-century court-houses of Bayreuth begin.

This afternoon among the ghosts of Eremitage, and in the company of those dear friends, met after so many years only to be parted again, these pale unreal hours of premature autumn twilight, remain for me, unworthy! the one real memory, the one thing which I treasure, of those Festspiel days at Bayreuth.

XX

THE SALVATORSKIRCHE AT COBURG

One of the things which charmed me most at Coburg (and everything had a charm that day of return to Germany) was the little Salvatorskirche; and perhaps because it has so little in it save what one's fancy could put in. It stands among the trees of its former cemetery, hard by the ramparts, a tiny box and tucked-in belfry. An old woman let us in, resuming her work of cleaning salads in a bowl, and scraping little mushrooms, which she had spread out in a corner of the church, alongside of a row of long rusty nails, both culled perhaps in the fat soil of the former graveyard. The little church is quite poor and quite bare: whitewashed walls, white pews and gallery. Nothing in it but the sacrament-table and the board with psalm numbers; and for sole ornament a few carved tombstones. They were scrolled and cherubed around, and the language, setting forth both the hopes of future bliss and the various past services in aristocratic connexions of the defunct burghers, suggested the curls of Ramillies-wigs and the knots of Sunday-laced *Steinkerques*.

And there among all these references to *High-noble,* and *Imperial-privileged high well-born* employers, and *Ritterguts* and *Kammerguts,* where the deceased Herr Motschmann or Herr Pfefferkorn had had the honour of being born, was a little slab with the bare fact that here rested the wife, most beloved in marriage (Eheliebste), of Herr Heinrich Ernst Angerstein, aged twenty-four, and of his only little son, Michael Friderikus, aged five months. . . . Prosaic little burghers, and a prosaic little church. But it was such bare, whitewashed churches, with nothing in them to please the eye, and no memories more inspiring than those of Herr Motschmann's and Herr Pfefferkorn's awaiting, peruked and cravated, for their own and their betters' resurrection, it was just such places as this Salvatorskirche, of Coburg, which were once peopled, filled, crowded, with the winged multitudes, ascending, descending, swirling, deploying, in ordered legions, and gathering into concentric blazes of musical glory, of Bach's organ fugues; and with the bands of erect archangelic chords, shoulder to shoulder, like rows of gigantic saints, of his chorals.

I have said that this day at Coburg (it was chilly and showery, but that did not matter) had for me the delight of return to Germany; I mean to such impressions as only Germany can give to our heart and fancy. It began with the first look out of my window. By the clemency of the Improvers, a tiny piece of town rampart

had not yet been turned into residences of retired bureaucrats, and the Golden Grape Inn faced a row of little old house-backs, covered with slate or painted pale green and rose colour, with immensely steep *eyeletted* red roofs, and attics where cats sat in meditation, all seen above a screen of birch-trees, and surmounted by the cock of the chief church-tower: roofs and attics for childish adventures, little houses for the dwelling of German Kays and Gerdas, with possible dangers from the Snow Queen. Leaning a little out, I could see the gate-tower, with its wet, silvery onion-cap. And through this gate one went straight into the chief street of the tiny city.

So small is this dear town of Coburg that before resorting, in true Germanic fashion, to a *Conditorei* for refreshment, we had walked through and through, round and round it, in the intermittent gleams and showers, perpetually returning to the same spots, when we expected it least, but always with new pleasure. First of all to the market-place, where they fry sausages under the beautiful Louis XV town hall, and the vegetable stalls are spread in front of one of those stately Jacobean (we should say) buildings, which, with their obelisked- and statued-angles, always remind me of the poops of State galleys, and suggest that they must have originated in Holland or the Hanse ports, and been towed inland along canals. The back of the ducal palace (the front being strictly Prince Consort

in style) is of this same gallant and pompous High Dutch Jacobean, not entirely unlike the architecture and panelling of an Oxford College; and which is given its date by the statue presiding over a similar building, a Duke Casimir, ruffed and moustachioed and booted and sashed in the fashion immediately preceding the Thirty Years' War. And with the Thirty Years' War, as in nearly all old German towns, there is a sudden cessation of all building, public and domestic; and the rest of Coburg is of the early eighteenth-century and under distinctly French influence: burghers' houses, many-windowed, shapely, but plain, with just a fine wrought-iron grating or a charming bit of stucco-work over the wide house-door, behind which the family coach was once remised. I wish I could convey the charm of these houses (as of the simple, stately, well-constructed first movement of an early eighteenth-century sonata or aria), particularly of some forming the precincts, so to speak, of the chief church of Coburg. They seem all to be inhabited by ecclesiastical worthies; Hofprediger, Kirchenrath, Organist, &c.; and they face the effigies of burly divines in leg-of-mutton sleeves and gauffred ruffs, stuck erect round the church walls under the lancet windows. There are posts and chains about the place, and the faded leaves float down and lie undisturbed under the lime-trees, the stillness being broken only by the playhours and the drill of the boys from the church school. And,

as we passed and repassed in front of this most engaging row of houses (one, particularly, dated 1729, under the Coburg escutcheon, with shutters and window-frames, doors of an exquisite grass-green against the whitewash), severe and *bandeaux'd* profiles of ecclesiastical ladies vanished from window-mirrors. In such houses, in such sequestered corners of sleepy, prosperous, half-mediæval towns, I said to myself, must have lived the great folk, the Aulic Councillors and Court preachers, of Jean Paul's novels. And not a stone's-throw off an inscription tells one that Jean Paul himself lived, one year only—1803-4—of what must have been his wandering life. At first it seems quite inappropriate, for this house, through some traveller's freak, has the classic air, with Corinthian pilasters between the windows, of a Louis XV palace built by Gabriel. But, going in, without mounting the fine eighteenth-century staircase, one can penetrate through a ground-floor passage into a black, narrow yard, with De Hoogh pails and brooms about: and thence enter a little garden, on to which open the windows of the poorer lodgers. The little garden is a mere widening-out of that grimy yard, with but a few poor lilac bushes and a plot of rank grass. But it looks up, as no street-front ever could, on to the steep, steep, climbing roofs of the church, scarlet and orange in the wet sunset flush as if geranium and nasturtium petals had been set edge to edge to tile it. It looks up into the silvery slate pagodas

of the two belfries, wonderful bulbs, like hyacinth roots and hyacinth-glasses, bulging and tightening, as if under the breath of a fanciful glass-blower, and ending off in lances and weather-cocks against the moist purple sky. And the windows looking both down into this little black yard and dank, green garden, and up into the fantastic climbing and bubble-bulging of those roofs and belfries, must have been Jean-Paul's, and, no doubt, also those of his Siebenkäs "Advocate of the Poor," and of his wife Lenette.

I must not leave off talking of Coburg (and I leave off unwillingly !) without taking note of the school which is built alongside of that Salvatorskirche, the shrill cries of its playground coming over the wall. For in a thicket of the old churchyard, among the black tree-trunks and mossy headstones, we discovered two tiny little girls, kneeling before a bench and busily writing capital U's in their copy-books : U—U—U—U, like a series of soft little hootings of baby-owls. Meanwhile below the trees and bench, the burgesses of Coburg and their wives, once bob-wigged and cravated, or farthingaled and stomachered, the Pfefferkorns and Angersteins, await, as their inscriptions tell us, the Resurrection of the Flesh. And it has, so to speak, arisen already, and is writing rows of capital U's (U—U—U—U, baby-owlet-hoots) in copy-books on a bench above the graves.

XXI

THE GRAVE OF WIELAND AND THE MAN IN THE RAIN

The chief adventure, this time at Weimar, was going to Ossmanstett to see the grave of Wieland. Not that I am aware of ever having read a single line of his; but after seeing the vault with Schiller and Goethe, and admiring the wreath wherewith "enthusiastic schoolgirls from Antwerp" had adorned the monument of Frau von Stein, one naturally thought of any additional item in that place of Death and Glory. So, "Where is Wieland?" I asked. The stout and stolid small girl presiding over Frau von Stein's mortality and immortality said she had nothing to do with him; he was buried in the park of his country house. On this, and in a manner which disconcerted my sense of Past and Present, my fellow-traveller suddenly remembered that an own great-aunt of hers was buried along with that poet in his *Landgut* at Ossmanstett. So for Ossmanstett and Wieland's grave we accordingly set out.

We drove in a vast and ancient landau which blocked the rutty road, and nearly heaved over into the flowery ditches whenever we met the

hooded carts returning at foot's-pace from the morning's market. Leaving on one side that funny little palace of Tiefurt, where Goethe and his Grand Duke once took their holidays, our road lay along the barely undulating slopes of ripening wheat and green oats of this wide, comfortable country which is so oddly at variance with Weimar's classic pretensions. There were little cherry and plum trees all along, and here and there a village, tucked with geranium roofs in a green hole, or marking a slight rise with barns and onion-towered castle, exactly like the villages in those cheap coloured prints which reproduce the pathetic homeliness of the lie of the land, and the sentimental romance of the dwelling-places, of so much of Central Germany.

We had just got into one of these villages, flocks of geese disporting in its gutter, when a great storm, which had been hurrying after us, burst in floods over our landau. However, the graves of Wieland and of Sophie Brentano (for hers it was, Bettina's sister) could no longer be very far off; so, the driver having pulled on an ancient livery coat of Weimar colours, whose manifold cape (the thing was once, I think, called a *Joseph*) may well have seen not Wieland and Sophie's graves, but Wieland and Sophie's selves, we splashed on to the inn at Ossmanstett. I own to having felt shy and foolish on arrival: the people at the inn would surely take us for lunatics. Indeed, I hastily composed a speech explaining our absurd dripping pilgrimage by

family piety to my companion's great-aunt; and, after all, does she not possess a little black silhouette of her, with frizzled toupé which looks like an additional profile? But the Grand Duchy of Sachsen-Weimar is broken in to any amount of worship of illustrious dead. A small girl, as matter-of-fact as the one who had shown us the grave of Frau von Stein, was deputed to conduct us, with borrowed umbrellas, to the last resting-place of Wieland and Sophie. We picked our way across the mud-streaming village street, past several large barns (of which more anon), and into the garden of Wieland's whilom house, which remained deaf to all our ringings. So, with the rain pelting down, we let ourselves be guided by the child across sopping lawns and under the dripping branches of the park. Thus we proceeded, through what was presumably (for tucked-down umbrellas hid all the upper world) an avenue of limes clipped into a long arbour, and sweeping the grass with its skirts, until we came to a dank place along a flowery little stream. The child bade us look up; and there, under black, soaking trees, was the object of our quest. It is a pyramid of stone, blackened by damp, but bearing on each of its faces a name: Wieland's own, his wife's, and Sophie Brentano's, with an emblem at each —a lyre for the poet, a butterfly for the poor girl, who died at twenty-five, and clasped hands for Frau Anna Dorothea, the wife whose trustfulness and devotion made all this romantic friendship

possible. And running round the whole monument was a distich expressive of the love of these three long-dead people.

The rain was still falling, dimpling the stream between the tresses of water daisy, and trickling from off the monument and also from off the borrowed umbrellas under which we stood in contemplation. The situation was comic, for we had kilted our skirts to our knees and stood with soaked thin shoes in the spongy beech-leaves, while the child from the inn waited with the stolid reverence of a sexton. Yet I confess to having felt deeply moved, and not the less for the thought that, incredible as it seemed, the romantic girl who had been buried there a hundred and nine years ago was the aunt of my fellow-traveller's mother, the sister of her grandmother: something far nearer to her, in reality, than I, her modern companion.

The rain continued in floods, and we wanted to await our famous landau in the porch of Wieland's former home. But its only inhabitant was a very large watch-dog, who prowled and growled around us with red eyes; so there was nothing for it but to follow the child back up the village road, and take refuge, while she went on to the inn, under the wide archway of a barn hard by. A man was already standing there, sheltering, like us, from the downpour. My first glance decided that he must be the village idiot. But he had on Sunday clothes and held a little bundle tied to a travelling stick. Then my

companion noticed that his poor, blear, beardless face, like that of some puzzled Low Dutch saintly Van Eyck or Memling, was wet, not with rain only, but with tears, and that his mouth was trembling. My friend accosted him and asked where he was going. He answered that he was in search of his wife, who had gone crazy and left him, taking his police papers away with her. He had thought to overtake her at Apolda, but at that place she had been heard of as at Erfurt, and he was on his way thither. He had walked since day-break, and had eaten nothing. He made no attempt to beg, and accepted the money we gave him almost without thanks, as if he scarcely took in my friend's injunctions to get a meal at the inn and take the next train for Erfurt; and his poor, blear, beardless face was still convulsed with crying. They were childless, he said, but she had not left him with another man. He was a day labourer, and could get no work without presenting those police papers she had carried off. He was well spoken and not at all foolish, but seemed so dazed by grief and wandering and hunger that we wondered, afterwards, whether he would not lose that money. We left him still under that barn gateway, waiting for the rain to stop, with the big dog prowling and growling in the background.

When we were about a mile on our homeward drive the rain did stop, and gleams of sun caught the wet, bronze-coloured wheat, while the wind tore a rift of blue under a great cumulus

bank. Looking backwards, we saw the rain still falling above the park of Ossmanstett, with Wieland's and Sophie's grave; but the light, with a faint rainbow, made against the horizon a white, wet streak, perhaps in striking on the face of that little stream. We wondered whether the poor, blear, weeping man was still under that gateway, and whether he would find his wife again. It was an odd contrast with the grave of the romantic poetic friends under the trees; but even as the rain which trickled on that hundred-years-old tomb had mingled with the tears on that poor, washed-out, puzzled labourer's face, so all the adventure was steeped somehow in the self-same pathos: Sunt lachrymæ rerum; et mentem mortalia tangunt.

XXII

CASTIGLIONE D'OLONA

When we had been trotting for an hour along that straight dull road from Milan to the Lakes, dull as befits the tidy banking-up of glacier gravel, I turned to the coachman, amusingly like an old-world postilion. "Isn't that Castiglione?" I asked. And on his replying that it was, I added I had thought it must be, because it looked like the photograph. Now I had never seen a photograph of Castiglione d'Olona; and this explanation was a shameful lie, improvised, like most of my occasional lies, to cloak a sentimental absurdity. You would not have had me tell that man, in his tarpaulin hat and many-buttoned jacket, that, at the very first glimpse of the battlemented village above the poplars in the narrow river trough, I had longed that this secluded bit of romance might be Castiglione d'Olona; or, if it was not Castiglione, longed I had the spirit to request the borrowed coachman to drive me there instead.

For it is not in the least true that I am interested in the beginnings of Renaissance Realism, about which I confess to highly mixed feelings; still less that I have wished passionately and since

years for closer intimacy with that rare Masolino da Panicale. But one has to give explanations in this foolish world, even like that explanation to the coachman. And it was not possible to tell my kind hosts on the Lake that I was suffering from acute infidelity to Italy ever since returning there, and therefore snatched at an opportunity (and a generously lent carriage and pair) of tasting once more the emotion which Italy ought to awaken. And this leads me to say, what I have never admitted before, that I am full of infidelities in my worship of the Genius Loci. It often takes me time to become attuned to change of place. The countries I like best are frequently those I happen to be leaving. And this particular return to Italy had not been in any sense rapturous. . . .

In saying this I do not mean to insinuate that Masolino's frescoes are a bore. They really must be exceedingly interesting, since they succeeded in faintly interesting even me. One can appreciate, thank heaven (or perhaps, alas !) when one cannot enjoy. And, believe me, I appreciated Masolino. This painter keeps a Giottesque naïveté and imagination through all his young Renaissance Realism, in a way less common among Tuscans than among North Italians, such as Jacopo Bellini and Pisanello. He had their fine romantic quality, delighting in knights and damsels. He has also that odd half-Oriental impassiveness of smooth oval faces and slit eyes, and impeccable manners in unlikely

moments (Herodias on her throne with ladies averting their eyes from John the Baptist's head, has an unflinching air of virtue like what the Lady of Vergi may have had when her lover's heart was served up for supper), that indefinable remoteness which makes the people of mediæval romance so much less like—well, say Wagner !—than like the Arabian Nights. Be this as it may, Masolino has just taken Giotto's invention, merely extended that lovely little statued and garlanded portico from being a profile on the flat into a deep and spacious cloistered yard, leading the fancy into places and times beyond. But that seemingly slight change means perspective and the solidity and structure of things ; and hence the Renaissance and the coming, presently, of Raphael and Veronese.

These interesting remarks I made to myself, again as a mere cloak for foolish emotion. Since emotion I did have at Castiglione d'Olona, only it was before seeing the frescoes, and also after I had forgotten all about them. I had that emotion the whole time I was in the place, and more or less the rest of the day ; and I knew I should probably have it, or a shadow of it, for quite a long while whenever my thoughts returned thither. It was the *Emotion of Italy*. Or, rather, one, perhaps the most poignant and almost harrowing, of the emotions which Italy can give. For countries, like people we love, have each a set of feelings [their own way of being lovable and hateful] which they awaken in us,

different from our feelings to any other country, but differing among themselves, like our varying response to the various expression and manner of the same human being: emotions of tenderness or repulsion, joy or sadness, or all mixed, even as is the case in the dramas which our fellow-creatures stir up in our poor foolish hearts.

It is largely a matter of smells. Not merely because smells have that unrivalled power of evoking past states of feeling, but because smells seem to distil and volatilise so many undefinable peculiarities of season, of climate, and of civilisation. At Castiglione d'Olona it was all three. For after I had crossed the chief square of that village of escutcheoned, dismantled palaces, and was bruising my feet upon the hard uphill cobbles leading to the church, there rose to my nostrils in the autumn afternoon the mingled scents of long-neglected drains, of sun-dried filth, of mint crushed underfoot, and, purifying all with its sense of life and ripeness, the smell of leaves baked by a summer's heat and fresh from a frosty dew. That mingled scent meant what cannot be put into words, the faint thrill of hundreds of such impressions, long merged and forgotten; blurred memories of other solitary walks through other forlorn little places of the past, between dust-heaps and palaces, past little corners of garden and terrace, which might be that where Romeo's ladder had hung.

Why is Italy full of such places? Why is its Past not homely and warm and close to us like

that of the North, but distant, forlorn, tragic with the smell of dead leaves and of charnel, with its gaunt show of splendour crumbling in base uses; a past whereof one often fails to understand the reasons for greatness, and oftener still the reasons for decay?

I fail, for instance, to understand this little Castiglione d'Olona. I see how on that flush and rapid Alpine river, cutting deep into the moraine slopes, it may have meant in bygone days mills (there are some still among poplars) and a ford, then a bridge, thence a castle, whose walls and corbels still remain; perhaps, as consequence, a great feudal Cardinal, who built the church and called Masolino from Florence to paint its walls. But why was this village not a village then? Why all these escutcheoned houses, exquisite carved portals and windows, remains of fresco and terra-cotta work, everywhere? And why, and when, did it begin to be left to crumble in the hands of peasants? Off the piazza, at a corner, you come upon an exquisite little Bramantesque church, suddenly and not without a little shock at the colossal St. Christopher guarding its door. It is the kind of church, in that kind of place, which is, in Italy, invariably locked, unused from year's end to year's end. There was mystery, therefore, in finding that its worm-eaten door yielded to a push. Open, but empty; or, rather, full of the past—an almost tangible, clammy presence. An exquisite church of that perfect cruciform which is so

rare and lovely, transepts and nave and apse, equally short, mere recesses from the low, brooding cupola. There were traces of fresco, and of fine triumphal Renaissance tombs, like those of some conquering admiral in a Venetian church. From the cupola hung quite the loveliest mediæval lamp I have ever seen; a lantern shaped like certain Gothic reliquaries, spurred or antlered round with miniature flying buttresses, each with its galloping St. George and distressed king's daughter; from its fine gargoyled oil vessel dangled a long, dusty tassel of faded crimson. The little apse also was hung with crimson brocade, frayed and stained into colours medicinal and poisonous, and striped with tarnished silver. And on the altar stood slender brass candlesticks, flanking a delicate ciborium, valanced with brocade. The ghosts of Renaissance prelates must have said Mass at shuddering chill daybreak. . . . It is impossible to express the charm, the sadness, and the mystery of this exquisite, empty, forsaken little church.

To complete my impression of return to Italy, I was met on leaving that church by the unmistakable scent of a funeral torch, though not a creature was visible throughout the square.

It was then that I noticed the wires and lamps across the streets. There was electric light in this place of ghosts, and on the walls, alongside the delicate brickwork of mediæval doors and windows, were rival electioneering posters. I

went to buy some picture-postcards in the village shop. Castiglione d'Olona, explained the tobacconist who kept it, is a place of daily increasing manufacturing importance. "Molta vita industriale," he repeated with pride, and instanced celluloid combs.

I did not see any trace of them. And, driving home, I turned back over and over again, until the belfries and walls of Castiglione d'Olona had vanished behind her yellowing poplars in the meadows, folded back into the past.

Then the cupolas and pinnacles of Monte Rosa suddenly loomed into sight, carved out of mother-of-pearl, fabulously high above a bank of opalescent vapours, against a pure pale evening sky. Had I really ever cared for any country except Italy ?

XXIII

CONVALESCENCE AT PISA

I do not remember what place the doctor had bidden me convalescence in after that suicidal fortnight of influenza. It was certainly not Pisa. But to Pisa I went, and instantly forgot about convalescing or the need of it. Though now I come to think of it, it is perhaps only after illness that the soul's sap rises so potently, covering all things with budding promise and delicate callow enjoyment, sweeping away all spiritual refuse in the exquisite tidiness of spring; one's own past playing the part of those little nests of withered leaves in which the violets and grasses of March arise incredibly brand-new.

The afternoon that we arrived at Pisa and the next morning there were heavy showers, in fact a good deal of what other folks grumbled at as bad weather. But I failed to understand what better could be wished for: the moist, moving sky carried out the scheme of colour—as of divinest pigeons—of the wet, weathered marble and the whitened lead of the cupolas. The walls of the cathedral, seen through the rain, rose from its shining terrace like some watery vision

out of the sea. The place was rife with sea-magic. And, indeed, it struck me that these buildings, in their buff and silvery pallor, and their smooth slightness of carving, have much the same quality as a certain big ribbed seashell, like an ionic volute, which is the most classic of all my few cherished possessions. That first late afternoon we not only wandered through fitful showers in the cathedral precincts, and to where the grass fields begin and the gaunt avenue of planes starts between battered antique statues, but also, like the vulgarest tourists, we sat in the Baptistery, listening to the echo: the verger's guttural falsetto, and a woman's silver voice turning into organ chords in that magical dome: the sights and sounds which should accompany Parsifal's grail-miracle but which surpass all stagecraft.

And from the steps of the Campo Santo, where they rise out of the fields of white clover, there was that view which seems to make itself a-fresh every time I go to Pisa, and one of whose delights is, nevertheless, its something inexpressibly venerable: a corner of city wall, this time, of course, with cherry-blossom and palest budding leaf, against a distant volcanic-looking hill, framed in by the gable and apse of the cathedral; a little view which seems too poignant to exist excepting in one's memory.

It being a case of convalescence, I had, of course, to get whatever I fancied; and what I fancied was a stroll in those very hills of which

that is one. The wish had, as a matter of fact, been in me for many years, and had seemed unreasonable—("What earthly reason is there for going there when there are so many other things to see?")—from its very modesty; but now it passed muster as a convalescent's whim, say, for toast and butter or similar too accessible dainties. And even now, such is the crooked complexity of human reason, I felt I must try to mask that wish with the famous monastery of Calci, which I had not the faintest desire to see, and which was really not worth seeing. Or perhaps it was; I mean Calci worth seeing. Anyhow we saw it, and in my happy mood I liked it: a vast spread of eighteenth-century stucco magnificence, with gallant allegorical paintings presiding over the benches and inky desks of a girl's school. Monks there were few or none, save an old Spanish Carthusian sewing at the machine among the Chartreuse bottles and postcards and rosaries of the porter's lodge. With much alacrity he told us in odd Spanish French that what he was busy with was a pair of breeches; men's breeches, *une culotte d'homme*, he insisted; though whether implying that Carthusians were not entitled to wear such, is a point for theologians. But while he talked with us my eye had lighted on a garment lying half finished by his machine, and it puzzled me: something like a tiny girl's stays, or a chest protector complicated with braces, of stiff, ribbed material. "Mon père," I asked, curiosity

overcoming manners, "what is that?" "*ça*—" he answered unmoved, and much less interested than in the breeches—"*ça*—oh, that is a hair-shirt—*c'est un cilice*."

So, our thoughts bent on mediæval austerities, and having tasted the monk's Chartreuse, we left the monastery and went out on the longed-for hill.

We strolled and sat among the old olives on their grassy terraces, and under the trellises, still leafless, between the cottages. A flock of sacrificial-looking horned sheep grazed in a narrow gorge filled with phyllirea and bryony, and hard by some men were chiselling one of the great round boulders of those hills into the millstone of an olive press. There was also a most enchanting couple, a small white cock of exquisite patience and politeness towards a delicate, fussy, and, as I thought, rather tiresome white hen; creatures with whom we did not, of course, become personally acquainted, but watched from a distance as one does one's betters.

Here and there among the olives, against the grass, shone out the white ball-dress of a cherry tree. Storms modelled those beautiful hills, filling their valleys with alternate sunshine and transparent smoke of shadow. And the inlets of the green plain, the creeks of what must once have been the Mediterranean, were marked everywhere by little ancient churches and belfries among the olives: a remote, peaceful, venerable region.

And there, against the sea-line, were the

marble miracles of Pisa, looking, at this distance, the two domes united into a shell, the tower pricked up askew like a horn, for all the world like a snail taking a walk. As regards those hills which I had longed for so many years, they had, on closer approach, even more charm than I had expected; a poignancy, almost a pathos, as of certain passages of Mozart (particularly in the "Zauberflöte" and the "Sonata with Variations") which I can never hear without a little stab of foreshadowed regret.

My convalescence was duly completed, not by the fulfilment of another wish, but the discovery of something quite unexpected. In the course of a solitary ramble, attracted by the towers and what remains of the city's upper water gate among the budding poplars, a certain friend of mine had stumbled into it. For it is a garden. Or, rather, it is hanging gardens; in point of fact the disused citadel of Pisa: bastions overgrown with ilex and honey-flowering bays, mysterious dank grass plots between, and walls spaliered with lemons and vast rose-trees, their crannies tucked full of wattled sheds of freesia. Those walls, of pale geranium brick coursed with silvery marble! You walk on top of them, along the battlements, up steps and down steps, across towers and turrets and terraces, on and on almost for miles; aerial passages lichened with orange and silver like a frayed brocade, leaning over whose parapet you can gather the shoots of wild fig and caper in the crevices, or the buds which

the great magnolias lift up from the hidden garden within ; and you look forth north, south, east, and west to the hills and the distant marble-mountains, and the swamps and pine-woods and the sea, over the town and the poplared river with its barges passing beneath the towers and walls : a promenade for imprisoned princesses, or for children the wards of wizards, surely.

But this is not all. In the midst of these hanging gardens and airy mazes there rises a little edifice, clapped on the city walls like an outlook turret or the dome of a chapel, but which the ancient gardener of the place unlocks with the mysterious words : " Il Caffe-Ausse." And, behold, a circular saloon, surrounded with circular divans, and frescoed all over with life-size Turks and Greeks and fair Circassians reclining in romantic valleys and sipping coffee among shawls and scimitars. These are the Giaours and Brides of Abydos and Laons and Cythnas of Byron and Shelley ! Thus did their readers imagine them ! Nay, thus did those poets doubtless see them with their mind's eye, however unlike, in Byron's case, to what was shown to the mere eye of the body. These classic Canova graces, these Talma and Madame Pasta draperies, are what answers to the rhetoric and sentiment with which even the greatest poets of that day invested the South and the East. Such, doubtless, were the rivals whom Guiccioli may have dreaded in Greece, Maids of Athens and Haydees. . . . Nay, now I come to think

of it, Byron and Shelley, in their Pisa days, may have sat many a time in this very place and gazed over their own coffee, at the sultanas and pachas and palikars of the Caffe-Ausse. I feel quite sure of it. And I like to think this hanging garden may have belonged to that "Amazing Marriage" Irish peeress, own grandmother to my friend E. F. who dwelt at Pisa, virtuous runaway wife, writing *on the education of children* (having left her own behind), befriending Claire Claremont, and inciting to the liberation of the Emilia of Epipsychidion. How oddly change the fashion-plates in accordance with which we deck and trim our souls! These people were warmer-hearted in many ways than we, less dilettantish—even a poseur like Byron going to his death for Greece; they candidly believed that human affairs could be run on a basis of heroism and romance. And so they sat and smoked without a smile among the frescoes of that Caffe-Ausse. What are, one wonders, the unsuspected humorous traits which will redeem, nay render lovable, *our* latter-day ideals and heroics in the eyes of posterity? What Caffe-Ausses are *we* too, all unconscious, erecting upon our childishly desecrated remains of exquisitely lichened and nobly overgrown ancient masonry?

Thus thinking about those splendid, funny immortals of 1820, and even more about the wizards' wards for whom those aerial labyrinths were really destined, I went away from Pisa restored to health, but also, I fear, to prose.

L

XXIV

BOCCA D'ARNO

I HAVE been lately again to the Mouth of the Arno. On the way thither we stopped, among marshy meadows full of poet's narcissus, at the solitary, forlorn Church of Grado, where once was Pisa's earliest harbour. As in that other sea-forsaken place, Ravenna, you go into the church down, instead of up, a few steps, giving it thereby something additionally sepulchral. It is utterly empty; a great carved Gothic shrine, white, silvery, looms therein, haunting its sunken sea-light. There is a view of this church, with its farm-steadings and pinewoods, in one of the Campo Santo frescoes of the Life of Saint Ranieri; a glory of angels swarms against the coppery cobalt sky above the roof of the church, quite unmistakable with its belfry. It must already then, in the fourteenth century, have been a forlorn, venerable place, with its look, encrusted as are its walls all round with oriental majolica and flowered Rhodian bowls, of being but a great fretted antique marble coffin, stranded by some flood of the river. I remember my surprise, on descending into it the first time—it was in autumn, more than fifteen

years ago—to find the damp-stained floor strewn with herbs and shredded myrtle, the thick, warm, crypt atmosphere smelling of mountain-sides.

That first acquaintance with the Church of Grado was on a fine adventurous occasion. The Arno was swollen with the September rains, the water fringed with tiny driftwood, and smelling of flood. Nevertheless, walking on the lower wharf of Pisa, we let ourselves be persuaded by a couple of boatmen, by no means unlike galley-slaves, who clamoured to row us down to the Arno's mouth. But when we got back to the boat after landing to see this very church, we found a sea wind had arisen, turning the peaceful brown flood into clear, green rough water; and, moreover, that the boatmen had been carousing in our absence. They were now more than half-drunk, rather frightened, and, after a mile or two more, quite unable to make any headway against the wind brushing the river backwards with greater and greater violence. So, each of us taking an oar, my friend and I were glad to be able to steer the leaky tub into the bushes, and, leaving our ruffians to return as they best could, to make the rest of our way by land to Bocca d'Arno. Looking back upon the absurd adventure, I believe we had a narrow escape of being drowned. But since we were not, and did eventually get to our destination, I am very glad to have had those four or five miles of, however dangerous, navigation. The river was

so wide, green, rough : the banks were so thickly set with bushes, high reeds, and vines run wild, in and out of which kept flying a little bevy of birds, disturbed by our splashings ; and, turning round, there was Pisa, reduced to the Cathedral and Baptistry, at last merely to the Tower, under the conical hills and storm-clouds. It seemed the river on which, in one of Boccaccio's loveliest stories, the faithful Constance let herself drift out to sea, seeking death, and awaking in Barbary, in the arms of her Martuccio.

The Arno takes on a great solemnity as it approaches the mouth, flowing through marshy meadows outlined against the sky by distant domes of pinewoods. And then there was the meeting of river and sea ; the first I had ever beheld in these tideless regions. Lashed by a violent south-westerly wind, the Mediterranean was roaring in great white waves, apparently, as we looked down the river, *above* the land, *above* the sands and the pinewoods. Towards this foaming bar went the river ruffled back by the wind, yet marvellously quiet in its massive steadiness ; and thus, mysteriously, unseen, the waters met ; no trace of river in that moving wall of waves, no trace of sea in the steady, wide, rippled river ; the secret meeting accompanied by a procession of wattled huts on posts, each rhythmically swaying, dropping and raising its huge spider net with its black spars and cranes, as if in some slow rite of salutation of those two watery divinities.

When we had got to the sands, which at that time were still unprofaned by houses, we sat for a long time on an upturned boat drawn in on shore. The sea roared with the noise of distant cannon; the river, under the wind, made the sound as of shaken silk, of a calm sea. The sun set briefly behind heaped-up clouds, where, half an hour before, the island of Gorgona had reclined, like Medusa's head (or John Baptist's !), on the silver charger of the waters, livid blue, mysterious. Then there remained of the sunset only a few burning gashes above the sea. But at that moment, up the river, opposite, the September moon arose above the hills, full, red with the redness of the vanished sunset, reddening the river and the bar of the sea.

That was, as I said, the first time I had ever seen the mouth of a great tideless river. It has a classic beauty, as of the Greek conception of death, compared with the drama, the tragedy, the alternating tidal fury and stagnant emptiness of our northern estuaries. And the ending of this Mediterranean river, full, flush, smooth, was made more solemn by the solitude, the boats and nets, with their primeval look, bringing home that the centuries have had nothing to say to that endless happening: the sea slowly retreating, the river gently, invisibly, adding grain by grain, inch by inch to the land.

Such was Bocca d'Arno fifteen and more years ago. Since then the meeting-place of those divinities of waters has, as happens to all such

sanctuaries, been desecrated by mankind's sadly brutal love of air and water.

That is why I have said nothing of this second visit to Bocca d'Arno ; but wish to keep some record of that first one. On this occasion we drove back, saddened, through the miles of stone pine avenue of San Rossore, the gold-dust of sunset hanging about the woods on the horizon. And it was dusk when we re-entered the gates of Pisa, and the grassy place where the Cathedral and Baptistry stand, huge marble reliquaries cast up by the retreating sea of Time.

XXV

THE DOCKYARD OF VIAREGGIO

THERE is an æsthetic virtue, more certainly even than a moral one, in the fact of not *having too much ;* short commons stimulating the spirit to extract all the interest and beauty which things themselves contain, and to add whatever they lack from its own riches. I recognize that this is the case (and am glad to recognize it) while tasting the modest charm of Viareggio after those days at Portofino. That siren sea, those more than Grecian hillsides and capes, have the splendour and aloofness of classic poetry, or rather of mythology enriched almost to cloyingness by Swinburne or d'Annunzio ; and one turns away with the "Too much ! Too much ! " of Tannhäuser at the Venusberg. Instead of which, how much intimate pleasantness, and even amusement, there is in these pale, straight sands, and pale sea barely breaking into white ; in the wide streets of little shut-up houses ; in the whitish colours of things under the whitish scirocco sky ; how one appreciates in this modern place whatever tells of former times : the Lucchese Palace, said to be haunted

and evidently uninhabited, by the port; and the score of houses of the original bathing-place, now stranded far back by the receding Mediterranean, with their meagre grace of Empire pilasters and lintels. And, over it all, the peacefulness, almost the pathos, of a season-place out of its season; shut up, asleep, doors and shutters bolted.

At this time of year Viareggio asserts itself as a harbour and dockyard. In the general somnolence the clatter of saws and chisels becomes heroic; the skeleton boats and those heeled over for repairs resume their importance of centuries ago, when ships were still made with an adze; and the one-masters turning the corner of the pier, sailing of evenings up the canal, with their few basketfuls of fish or little load of sulphur or of wine, become, well! what exactly similar craft may have been in Genoa or the Port of Pisa hundreds of years ago, nay, in the days when the Greeks first settled at the mouth of Arnus, and the Sicilian traders built a temple to Aphrodite Erycina where now are Lerici and Porto Venere. This predominance of the port and of the dockyard, with its making and mending of boats, in every stage, from sawing planks to ramming tow into old keels, gives Viareggio, moreover, the moral charm without which all æsthetic and romantic quality leaves but an evil after-taste and a grittiness between the teeth.

One is so sickened by the prostitution of Italy

to idle strangers, or rather so sickened by the effects thereof (it being a case, like that of La Rochefoucauld's light lady, where the chief sin is almost the least), that the absence of it has an actual value of grace and dignity, comparable to that of the juicy grass, the free-growing unpollarded olives, the unshorn brushwood of these neighbouring hills ; and of those running waters, as we saw them yesterday, bubbling over the great washing-trough at Stiava. The twenty or thirty women washing in that living stream scarcely turned round to notice us ; and the small girl who carried our basket uphill disappeared after setting it down, unconscious of the possibility of tips. After Portofino and its villageful pressing its poor lace, its postcards and nosegays on to tourists, there is more than relief, there is actual pleasure, in such an attitude on the people's part.

This indifference towards the *forestiere* (the very children in Viareggio harbour are too absorbed in the caulking and sawing and forging ship-iron and loading and unloading to notice one), and the look of comfort and decency in this Lucchese country, have always doubled its attractions for me. One can accept the human and modern element ; one can think of the real and the present instead of blinking them, and giving too much attention to the past and the imaginary, as happens wherever, in Venice, Rome, the Riviera, and, alas ! even in Florence, the Present and the Real attacks one with mere

misery and self-advertisement. The Italy of beggars and backsheesh and Grand Hotels and antiquaries' shops is, for the more sensitive among us, a tawdry theatrical concern, suggesting lath and tinsel, smelling of paraffin, and such that the soul cares not to penetrate into. Instead of which, in the presence of people decently living their own life one can live, so to speak, with the whole of one's sensitiveness and imagination, and thus obtain, even æsthetically, the fulness and depth of enjoyment which is not merely æsthetic. I flatter myself that it was this which Wordsworth meant in those lines of the "Prelude":

> . . . *more to every sense*
> *Delicious, seeing that the sun and sky,*
> *The elements, and seasons as they change,*
> *Do find a worthy fellow-labourer there.*
> *Man free, man working for himself with choice*
> *Of time, and place and object.* . . .

Surely, it is this sense of human dignity in Wordsworth, of human freedom and intellect in Shelley, which give to both of them their fuller harmonics, their richer *timbre* and makes us feel, we scarcely know why, that, immature and redundant and platitudinous or verbose as they too often are, they belong to a finer race, they can give and they can elicit more, than a mere perfect artist like Keats.

It fits into this kind of impression that the special loveliness of this little seaport lies in

what has given it health and prosperity: the great canals which have drained into rich grass-land and rice-field what, a century ago, was a malarious swamp whither the Republic of Lucca sent its murderers to die slowly of fever like Dante's Pia. These canals are shallow, but rapidly flowing and brimful, like English rivers; they widen into barely rippled ponds, not without grace of water-lilies, wherever the big barges have dredged out sand for the sawmills of the neighbouring marble mountains; and they lead, through fields of greenest grass and of brown and golden sedge, to the pure blue circle of the little Lake of Massaciuccoli. One felt miles, or rather countries, away from the rocks and olive-groves where we had watched the women washing the previous day. It might have been Norfolk or Holland. But towards sunset the mists dissolved, and the great marble mountains emerged little by little, crags and peaks as high as any Alps, because they root not in high inland valleys, but in the sea-marsh and the sea.

We were rowed and sailed by an amusing but rather alarming person, a one-legged ex-sailor, whose nimbleness with his stump and crutch, and his glibness in a sort of Levantine pidgin-Italian made him fit for some *picaresque* sea-romance of Defoe or Stevenson, a Jack Tar, of all sinister trades and escaped galley-slave at the least. But he owned only to having spent, poor creature, several years in various hospitals, and to receiving a pension from an Ocean-Liner

which had crushed his leg with a luggage-crane. Nay, he presently acquired a romantic and lyric character, instead of his original Treasure-Island suggestion, by informing us that it was his grandfather, only recently deceased, who had discovered the body of Shelley in the sand near the pinewoods. Perhaps it is not uncommon among Viareggio mariners to have grandfathers who picked up, or nearly picked up, Shelley eighty-nine years ago.

But, be this as it may, I forgot all about the canals, and the Ocean-Liner, and the pirate-ship, and my mind was filled with one of those visions of which it is impossible (like the story of the boatman's grandfather) to determine whether they are of the nature of reality or delusion. I saw the little Elzevir Æschylus (or was it Plato?), with the pencil scrawl of "I awake from dreams of thee," which had been in that drowned man's pocket. Mr. Browning had shown it me years ago, or Mr. W. Rossetti. Or . . . had I dreamt it all? With the vision and the doubt, I was put ashore in the dockyard of Viareggio.

XXVI

VALLOMBROSA

I ARRIVED at Vallombrosa, coming up from the June swelter of Florence, to find its rocks and forests veiled in chilly mists; an impression of extraordinary back-of-beyondness in this half invisible place, reached, with the mysterious rapidity almost of a lift, by the little funicular railway. There was an avenue of big trees, disappearing rapidly into the white fog; wide meadows fitfully revealed; a great boulder with the hogged mane of a cutting in firwoods; and, when we looked down from that place, with the belfry, the fortified towers of the abbey appearing and disappearing below, I had a feeling of remoteness and extreme improbability after my two hours' journey from home.

I should explain, if such things are explicable, that in this quarter of a century and more it had never occurred to me to go to Vallombrosa. The name meant a mountain-side visible almost from my house step, tapestry-green and blue in summer, violet and rosy in autumn sunsets; and in winter charming me (so that I often walked to some height whence the whole range was visible) with the sudden drama of its snow-

storms, white and ultramarine blue among the clouds. And when once a piece of landscape has thus become a familiar background, our fancy is oddly sluggish in thinking of it as a place in which one can be, and to which one might go. Be this as it may, and to bear out my belief that the most impressive journeys are those within sight of one's own home, the discovery of Vallombrosa had been reserved for my—I really believe—thirty-fourth year at Florence.

By the next morning the mist had cleared off. After the heat and stuffiness of the plain, what an impression, on going out, of coolness, freshness, scent of grass and flowers, song of birds, of everything that is not, so to speak, the refuse of oneself; a feeling which slakes the thirst of one's soul, and washes one's dust-clogged thoughts. I went to sit on the wood's edge behind the little garden of the School of Forestry; and got into the habit of returning there, day after day, as long as I remained on that divine mountain-side. That little garden had the delightfulness of something exotic: scant, none of your Italian summer excess of vegetation, just a few flowers, cared for, showing a little difficulty of growth, as in an English cottage-garden. But here and there, affirming Italy, an old gate, architectural and finely cut, of the monks' time; and behind the trees, the belfry and towers, the extent of the former monastery.

This presence, not so much of the monastic element (though there certainly is a hushed and

disciplined quality in that) as of the urbane and ornate architecture of the Seventeenth Century among these lonely forests, is to my mind a chief charm of Vallombrosa. Come upon in the woods in tabernacles and chapels and flights of steps, these copings and bevellings, pilasters and volutes lose all their city ostentation and strike one as merely deliberate and dainty, like the dress of one of Velasquez's laced and purfled huntsmen. One may take from them a lesson in the entrancing power of *little*, and the manner in which all essential impressions are best conveyed in tiny quantities.

Something similar applies to the abbey itself. It takes meaning and worthiness from the forest surrounding it, the remoteness of the place and the rigours of its winters.

One day we went over the monastery, since many years turned into a school of forestry: the great corridors with former cells opening on to it, the refectory with the forestry pupils' supper spread; the monastic kitchen, and all the former conventual rooms, with the lads' fencing and gymnastic apparatus, the chemical laboratory and collections of various kinds of wood, of forest plants and animals, the abbey library now filled, under the portraits of Abbots and Venerables, with scientific books and periodicals, and, alongside the library, the little rooms where the boys play at chess and smoke in the snowy autumn and spring evenings. But fitting in even more with my dreams of a world on the model of M.

Besnard's frescoes of the Ecole de Pharmacie, were the vistas of the abbot's apartments with women going to and fro, and children running about and playing. A great monastery, still with a bit of mediæval fortress about it, turned into a place of useful learning, learning not of humanities, but of natural history, and inhabited by studious men and boys, and by women and children—the chief professor's nine little ones playing with dogs and cats and apprentice foresters at the abbey gate, and rolling in the grass by the fish-pond—such a place answers to the various claims a decent creature would make upon life, on the past and the present, the grace and dignity of the centuries and their purified remembrance among the work and the love and the hope of to-day. And all round, holding it quiet and safe, the great forests of beech and fir, the distant pale pastures and blue rocky crests. Does the reality fall short of my imagining? Are the forests perhaps less well tended, the professors perhaps less profound, the pupils perhaps less fervid, the whole partaking somewhat of the perfunctoriness of most human beings? Possibly. But whatever the prose of the place may be, its poetry, its possibilities under fortunate circumstances, its suggestion to anyone with a spark of humanity and imagination, is of the best, most satisfying kind. The poetry, as I said, of Besnard's great paintings, and of a few rare biographies of scientific men, like Madame Duclaux's incomparable life of her husband.

Another place concentrates for one the other kind of poetry of which Vallombrosa is full. It is called after the *Holy Beechtree*. The great mossy tree slants its branches, poises the tent of its leaves over a little terrace, benches, and steps, weather black, velvety-green with moss, strewn with brown beech leaves as if brocaded and carpeted for some sylvan procession. Alongside is a tiny chapel, almost a temple, a porch supported on slim Ionic columns. The place is almost within hail of the monastery windows, but so enclosed, so isolated, as to give a sense of infinite woodland remoteness. Here the mountain guide Storno, looking like nothing so much as an old half-plucked hawk on a barn door, retailed his experience of the former monks, given over to pomp and to sloth, and keeping vigil only when they stole out, even across the winter snow, to the girls in the village in the valley.

"And here," he said, pointing to the Holy Beech, "they would come for afternoon picnic."

Whatever degree of truth in the old gentleman's gossip, I prefer to think of the Holy Beech in less ecclesiastical connexion, and of Saint John Gualberto not as the spiritual father (in stucco clouds) of such a questionable brotherhood, but rather as some kind of woodland deity of far-off pagan days, whose bearded face laughs here and there on lichened cross or column in the forest, whose pastoral staff and lion-handled sword, on boundary stone or tabernacle, should be the

symbol not of a sentimental mediæval legend, but of some ancient earth-worship.

Nay, the real sylvan god is *this*—the great beech-tree itself, spreading over its own moss-covered altar-steps. And even those carnal and hypocritical monks of old Storno's tales must have been subdued by the solemnity of the great woods and the mystery of their sounds, by the armies of pennoned firs, the processions of white-armed beeches in the dusk and the mist, by the hum of unseen bees, and the gathering rustle of the scarce-stirring foliage, into some sort of annual purification of their poor little souls in this ancient outdoor shrine.

That little chapel or temple alongside of the Holy Beech is, of course, scrawled over with the colossal signature, the loutish jests, of generations of trippers. But in front of the empty altar the wind has gently strewed a little drift of beech leaves, brown and fragrant.

Such are the things which Vallombrosa has meant to me now I have got to know it. And how differently I shall feel, with what harmonics, or harmonies rather, of memories and fancies, whenever in future I shall see the great hill at the turn of my lane, with the autumn sunset flushing it violet, or the winter snow deepening by contrast its storm-blue.

XXVII

PETRARCH'S HOUSE AT ARQUÀ

I wish I could gather together my wits and words to catch and hold the memory of that afternoon at Arquà. *Gather together*; the expression keeps recurring to me, for the day was one which itself held things close and brooding in its veiled sunniness, and gave to present scenes the narrowed and insulated serenity of things long past and much remembered.

After that precocious winter of snowy Alps and muddy towns which first met me in Italy, the returning heat has sucked fogs from all this soaking green country of reclaimed swamp and never-ending canal, making the pavement of Padua wet till noon, and the great loggias of its public palace clammy as with historical horrors; and wrapping the fields at sunset, and our souls also, with a dank cere-cloth of cold vapours. Never has Italy been less Italy for me. But that day at Arquà—(it was only the day before yesterday, though I cannot believe it, writing in the train on these sunburnt, crumbling, Apennine slopes)—that day at Arquà, the mists were merely benignant, enclosing us, as the motor rushed

along, in a succession of little peaceful worlds of sunny gentleness.

First—for I see it as one of those globes, copied perhaps from those of crystal-gazers, such as are held by painted symbolical angels, the days of Creation, the Earth and its Kingdoms curdling in little round pictures on their dimmed circular brightness—first, the cupolas and minarets, so amazingly Eastern, of Padua, left behind among yellowing plane-trees. Then, the first Euganean cones coming in sight, pale blue, inconceivably bodiless, bubbles of luminous smoke on the faint plain.

Later, the canal of the Brenta, its slow jade water flowered at the brink with russet sedge and lilac Michaelmas daisy; some village recalling, with its old Venetian inns, the days when people went leisurely from Venice to Ferrara and Bologna by barge, such little details from the past adding themselves quite naturally to this present, already so like a remembered thing in its dim aloofness. Presently the sharp castled crag of Monsèlice arose out of the sunny October veil, and we crossed that Brenta canal, of which it is pleasant to think that its waters have rushed blue on the shingle of the Alpine portals, turned the floating mills at Bassano, and are going to die in the black-and-gold tulip splendours of sunset on the Lagoon. The road now made straight into the hills, which hitherto we had only skirted, between willowed meadows and symmetrical festoons of vines, laden even this grapeless year,

and of a uniform lovely rose colour, like some still undiscovered alloy of copper and silver. Into the Hills, the Euganeans; and into the very lap of their southernmost cones.

I have never seen lovelier country than about Arquà; and, what is more, of that particular southern loveliness which, even in Italy—perhaps most in Italy—has for me the fascination of something rare and precious—I would say classic, Odyssean, Hesperidean; and all on the brink of this damp, green plain, sea-swamp reclaimed, and river alluvium, of Venetia; indeed, in the midst of it, for the Euganean Hills seem to have bubbled out of it, leaving their valleys flat. Those little volcanic hills hold Arquà close on all sides, save to the south, where the damp delta of the Po is, so to speak, warded off by the last Euganean, a perfect cone, distant and silvery in the autumn sunshine; the whole of this unlikely bit of Mediterranean country hidden, tucked away, isolated from the northern lands all round. The slopes round Petrarch's village are spaliered with luxuriant yellowing vines, and tufted with cypress; the jujube tree grows in the vineyards, and the scarlet pomegranate, and there are plentiful olives, larger and freer-growing than our Florentine ones, with almost Greek girth of split trunk and ample hang of boughs. One expects wild lavender and myrtle, and I am not sure I should not find it could I wander, without thought of Petrarch or motor-car, freely among the rocks. The rocks!

That is perhaps the southernmost thing at Arquà. For there is a kind of rock, white and friable, as if from steady generous heat, tufted with aromatic herbs and sunburnt grass, which, to anyone knowing the South's especial emotion —the emotion one gets at Portofino and Alassio, in the Maremma and Greece, and, most of all, from Provence (I am thinking of the Abbey of Montmajour, near Arles) means the South far more than any detail of vegetation.

Petrarch's house is the last of the village. It stands in a little garden, which has kept its box-hedges under the vines and tall bay-trees; a small two-storeyed house, with such an outer stairs and porch as Italian farmhouses have, and the mediæval houses also of Viterbo. It has Gothic windows like those you see in every street at Venice, but here they strike the imagination, and almost catch one's breath, for they mean that this house is not merely on the same site as the poet's, but that the man Petrarch actually lived in it just as it is.

Lived here. One may say *lives* here. Do not misunderstand me; I fear that while recognizing (and the huge visitors' books with Affieri's, Goethe's, Byron's, Shelley's testimonials force one to recognize) the extraordinary importance which Petrarch has had both for lovers and patriots in days gone by, I fear that as regards myself Petrarch is just among the most satisfactorily dead among the immortals. When I say "lives here," I mean—what *do* I mean? for

it is a feeling, not an idea. . . . Well, I mean that the house, despite the collections of manuscripts and the portraits and inscriptions and faded laurel wreaths, looks like the house of any scholarly Italian priest; and Petrarch, the Italian scholarly priest—(I fancy him a retired Barnabite or Oratorian bringing with him his books and studious habits)—might be living there now, trimming those box-hedges and pruning those vines—in fact, keeping and explaining the relics of another Petrarch, the fabulous laurelled poet whose verses are illustrated in quaint, bad Giorgionesque frescoes all round the ceilings. Up there, for instance, in that familiar Venetian landscape of blue hills and emerald-green valley and distant white steeples, behold Madonna Laura wandering in crimped yellow hair and white brocade, in company with every possible allegorical goddess, and an assortment of pleasant mythological creatures, dryads, fauns, winged horses, and dying swans. And in the next compartments Messer Francesco, gowned and hooded, with Muses leading him through ceremonious and lyric meetings, until (on the opposite wall) poor Laura, stung like Eurydice by a (metaphorical) snake, lays herself prone, a white brocaded doll, in the soft grass (l'erbette molli) by the unfailing "chiare acque." And further on still the Poet, disconsolate, grows into a bay-tree, finger-tips putting out green leafy gloves, and a branch of laurel shooting out of the neck of his purple canon's gown.

The house contains a more unlikely, and, to my thinking, more convincing record of Petrarch's fidelity in affection; in a glazed-in niche over one of the doors a most mysterious figure, something between a naked wax-doll and a ferret. A Latin poem on a marble slab explains it to be Petrarch's Cat; his chief love, Laura coming in, quite explicitly, only for the second place in his affections. Perhaps—who shall decide?—those verses may contain a grain of truth, for there must be more trouble and less glory in embalming a cat than in enshrining oneself with one's lady in a volume of verse. But then, as before confessed, I feel that the poetry-reading lovers of bygone days must really have been most madly in love to get emotion out of Petrarch's verse, whereas the Vita Nuova on the one side, and Shakespeare's sonnets on the other, seem to record and forestall all the finest joys and griefs of passion.

But, unappreciative as I am, I shall love Petrarch henceforward for the sake of his surroundings. Only the greatest possible dear, let alone a great philosopher and poet, could have lived in that house and in that place: an exquisite young goat was tethered in the long grass under his windows, and flocks of turkeys, pure cobalt with offended majesty, strutted outside his door, no ordinary farm property, but, as the Germans say, "Wonder Beasts" descended from embroideries and zodiacs to do the Poet honour. By the time we had got to his

tomb I was aware that I should probably take to reading Petrarch, and find that he was really quite as great as Goethe and Alfieri and Foscolo and Byron and Shelley, and all those other multitudinous signatories of the registers we had turned over, had ever said he was. Any way, I was secretly moved.

The sarcophagus of red Veronese marble, evidently copied from Antenor's tomb at Padua, stands on the terrace of the white village church. The bells were ringing in the funnel-capped Venetian steeple, and Our Lady of the Rosary, in gala of tarnished brocade and paper flowers, was waiting on her palanquin, ready for to-morrow's procession, and quite superior to the poet resting at her threshold.

But as we walked down the steep stony street of Arquà there arose, summing up all that impression of southern simplicity and grace, the smell, the sweetest surely of nature's many kinds of incense, of burning olive-twigs.

At Este, beyond those last Euganean cones, we had our tea among the scabious and mint, the many butterflies, of the grass slope within the castle walls, above which rises a fringe of pines and cypresses, the last trace of South above the soaked Ferrarese plain. And here the power of poetry triumphed over the genius of localities in my heart: this dull little Venetian market town of Este is the place where Shelley wrote his "Euganean Hills," the second act of Prometheus, I think, and that little rhyme "O Mary dear, if

thou wert here," whose refrain "the Castle Echoes answer *here*" went on in my head for hours, scanned by the steady breathings of the motor.

We rushed along interminable avenues of planes to Montagnana, a garrison town which, from outside, looks what it did in Petrarch's day, under the Scaligers or Marquises of Este or of Mantua. The last Euganean had long since vanished into greyness. The usual icy mists were rising, in a sky of blotted-out sunset, from the wet grass under the towers and walls and drawbridges of that ghostly fortress. And bells rang, rang, rang in every village; and in night and fog we awoke, so to speak, from the sunny dream of Arquà.

XXVIII

THE TREASURE OF VENZONE

We jumped out of the Vienna express at sunrise, and, chartering a broken-down gig at the first roadside station after the Custom House, we entered Italy by the great rocky portals where the Tagliamento swirls into the plain of Venetia.

For in that mountain gateway, under the sawlike peaks (which seem those of the Virgin of the Rocks) of the Carnic Alps, and between the rapid stream of purest, pale periwinkle water, and a shining white river of dry glacier stones arrested on the hillside, lies the little town of Venzone, forgotten by history alike and by progress, but not to be forgotten by the Sentimental Traveller.

I had been to Venzone, whose existence I had not previously suspected, on a burning August day some years ago, and had brought back an impression, above all, of the strange transparency as of jasper or amethyst, of the bare rocks in the fierce mid-day heat, their sharp edges luminous against the blazing sky. And under this marvellous pallor made of light, I remembered the little piazza of Venzone, on one side the Palazzo Pubblico, colonnaded and loggia'd and stair-

cased, with its lion of St. Mark ; on the other a charming Venetian Gothic house with a dishevelled vine, and in the middle, by a Veronese funnel-shaped belfry, orange with age and lichen, a fountain already German in shape, trough, column, and spirts, lacking only the man-at-arms or mermaid belonging to Teutonic countries. I remembered also the church of smooth grey stone, delicate lilac in that light, lifting its high belfry, and the saints and angels of its gables, into that fiery blue sky, against that crystalline glittering amethyst of mountains. It stood, I remember, with the delightful quality of perfect unity and utter solitude, at the end of the village-like little town, close against the vine-covered city walls, with only grass and orchard round. And its interior, bare and empty, with half-effaced frescoes and trodden-out escutheons, had the sanctity given by age and desolation, by silence and the sweetness of fresh hay and sunburnt vines entering warm through the open doors.

But, above all, what I had brought back and cherished from that first visit to Venzone and its church was the recollection of a Treasure. That is not quite what I mean, and what I mean is difficult to put into words. For, of course, I had seen far finer church treasures all the world over—crucifixes and ostensoria like Gothic spires, or buttressed chapels shaped of gold and silver ; reliquaries like Byzantine basilicas, pillareted or cupola'd, translated into fretted

metal and deep blue enamel; missal-covers of onyx and jasper, set with uncut topaz and carbuncle, or carved in ivory with stola'd figures like Grecian muses; crowns and circlets for Kings and Queens of the Nibelungenlied, or the Chanson de Roland; ivory combs and horns and skewers; and, what has ever touched my imagination more than all the rest, barbaric crosses into whose rudely hammered and jointed gold plates are set cameos of crowned Cæsars, and root-of-emerald carved with Bacchanals. . . . What was the poor little treasure of Venzone compared with all I had seen of such things at Monza and Aix-la-Chapelle, at Cologne or Troyes? Still less compared with the collections of the *Retrospective* at the Paris Exhibition? And mentioning the Paris Exhibition brings home and explains what it was I remembered at Venzone, and what I returned to Venzone to enjoy once more. For in those glass and iron domes of the Exhibition, among those labelled glass cases, a wish had gradually arisen in my mind, the longing to see and *feel* this sacred art of the past, additionally sanctified by the sense of time and remoteness; a dream, for it took a real name and imaginary shape, of the *Treasure of Conques*, profaned in that worldly show, back in its original place, in the forlorn weather-beaten church which I pictured to myself among the arid slopes of the Cévennes. Well, as sometimes happens in similar cases, that longing, that year-long dream, had suddenly

been realized where I expected it least, when I had come upon Venzone, its Church and its Treasure.

Passing through the sacristy we groped into a windowless closet, pitch-dark and stacked with discarded church furniture, banners, and tall gilt lanterns. By the light of a candle an iron door was discovered, a safe built into the church wall. There was endless fumbling with wrong keys, turning of locks and counter-locks, one within the other; the bolts and bars were slowly drawn, and, after muttered invocations and thumpings and tuggings, the great iron-studded door at last opened, and the light of the wax stump fell on the closely packed effulgence filling that deep black hiding-place. Slowly and with difficulty the many-antlered crucifixes and ostensoria were disentangled from each other, and handed out, glittering in the smoky light, for us to hold and wonder at. Then, one by one, the embossed paxes and pateræ, the ivory pyx, the tulip-shaped chalices, and the silver-gilt reliquary in the shape of a Venetian galley with oars and rigging of gold. The air in that long-closed place was icy and gravelike, tasting of incense and old, old woodwork, and funeral torches snuffed out long ago. One's very senses were filled with the forgotten, venerable past. The thought of that unknown Church of Conques on its imaginary hillside, the poignancy of that absurd, long-cherished wish of mine, rang clear and harmonious through

my present mood, much as the sound of the bells high above me interrupted the midday stillness and mingled with it. For the second time Venzone had realized my dream of seeing a church treasure in its right surroundings.

We lingered a little in the empty church, spelling out the inscriptions round the coats-of-arms on the flagstones and the great crested and feathered helmets of German pattern. Then we clambered up a worm-eaten staircase, and on to the platform of the belfry, dripped over as with pitch with the greasing of the bells. We stood for a long time under the big green bells, their long clappers close to our heads, and looked idly into the present and the past. Close below us the Madonna and Angels on the pinnacles profiled their weather-worn draperies, and jagged metal wings no longer against the blue of the sky, but on the green of the grass and the vines. And round the delicate edge and angles of the church gables, pale-grey stone, with a faint rosiness of lichens, lay the little town, with its crown of orchards among the battlements, and its Venetian chimneys and Veronese belfries. The wide, white bed of the Tagliamento, the wider white moraines encircled it, and those high, bare, crystalline crags, the portals of the Alps opened in front, showing a horizon of bluish misty plain; the great Dolomitic ranges closed it all in behind; a wonderfully remote little place, though the express from Vienna to Venice rushes past

three times a day, unconscious of it and its Treasure.

On the occasion of my first visit, the sacristan who showed the Treasure (he would have preferred to show us half a dozen queer modern corpses, mummified by some freak of the soil, and of which he was the official guardian), while fumbling at the locks and snuffing his taper-end, entertained us about the past and the present of Venzone. The town, commanding that gate into Italy, had been fought for during centuries by the Dukes of Carinthia and the Patriarchs of Aquileia; it had taken tolls and secured charters from the wandering Emperors and the Republic of St. Mark; it had been a place of merchants, half Venetian and half German, who built the little balconied palaces, and the triple belt of walls, and the Palazzo Pubblico, and the fountain, and this church. And the Treasure had been made by native goldsmiths, or given to the town by foreign princes and prelates. While now it was inhabited only by a handful of vintners and peasants cultivating the lowest slopes of the mountain; the families to whom all the land belonged, and who rented it to these poor people, living at Gemona and at Udine, never coming near the place themselves. "No one comes to Venzone," said the sacristan, and vainly set forth the attractions of those mummies; see, he had caused an itinerant photographer to make a picture-postcard representing a row of them, but even that had not sufficed to attract travellers.

The light of the candle-stump flickered once more among the gold and silver and enamels of that deep black hole. The iron door closed again; locks, double locks, and bolts and bars and all; and this time for heaven knows how long! I had a feeling that it had never been opened during the four or five years (and so much else seemed to have opened and closed in that time!) which separated my two visits to Venzone. The sacristan recognized me at once; the innkeeper, the owner of the broken-down gig, the tobacconist, the cobbler, and the sergeant of gendarmerie—all the notables, let alone the street children. "No one ever comes to Venzone nowadays," they all said. And if any should come in the future, I believe that this third traveller, this third seeker after the Treasure of Venzone, will again be myself.

XXIX

THE LAGOON OF COMACCHIO

That was an extraordinary impression when we came upon the ramparts of Ferrara. Other walls hide the shrunken cities behind them as utterly as these; the walls of Rome, for instance, seeming to enclose only empty, forsaken spaces. But these ramparts of Ferrara not only let you guess at no roofs or belfries behind their star-shaped bastions and lines of yellowing trees; they separate that invisible and unthinkable town from an uninhabited emptiness: not a suburb, not a farm; only, for miles and miles, the great fields of grass, the endless rows of poplars, the dykes and turbid canals of the great river Po dwindling and dying in its delta.

We came upon those ramparts very fitly after a day in one of the emptiest regions I have ever seen, although it is one of the richest of all Italy, and the scene, at this very moment, of Socialist agitation and great rural strikes. But the peasants are gathered together in the little towns and big villages, each with its "Casa del Popolo" and Socialist club; also at the tramway stations, whither teams of white bullocks

carry hemp and beetroot on those great carved carts, like sixteenth-century gun-waggons. And, except where the ploughing has begun with yoke upon yoke, the immense fields and meadows are empty, empty ; far emptier than the Roman Campagna.

Hurrying along in my Bolognese friends' great motor, we began to notice—(as ploughed fields were exchanged more and more for grass and the orange rice-stubble, and as the poplar rows yielded to dykes and hedges of tamarisks)—we began, I said, to notice flights no longer of starlings, but of wild duck, and here and there a swarm of white gulls. Then, as the motor rushed onward, a strip of metallic grey came into sight, and widened into an immense circle of shallow sea, barely bounded by faint, faint lines of coast and mountains. And a few minutes later we were speeding between swamps of faded sea-lavender and crimson sea-sorrel, and then along a dyke, miles long, with the leaden waters on either side, in front, all round, to where we found the towers of Comacchio, a microscopic Venice, with canals and staircased bridges and wharves, hiding its malaria behind flower-like tints of plaster, oleander-pink, carnation, pale orange and lemon and lilac, and indescribable silver and green of sea-weathering, as of a frayed brocade. A tiny Venice, much further from the mainland, this poor little Comacchio, in a lagoon twice as extensive, closed in by dunes and oak-scrub, and through which only

one narrow channel, with its yellow Chiozzot boats, leads to the open sea, raging with muddy tide against those sandbanks. One asks oneself why Comacchio should not have become a Venice, instead of a village of fishermen and poachers, and have lived off Eastern trade, instead of catching eels in wattles and salting them from the neighbouring salt-sheds. The answer, I take it, is the same as to the question why not a boat is to be seen ; not a sail on those miles of inland sea. The answer, namely, that while the smaller Alpine rivers, Brenta, Sile, Piave, and their comrades, traverse the salt lagoon with their swift currents, and make the canals of Giudecca, Grand Canal, and all the lesser Venetian waterways, let alone those between the outlying islands; the various mouths of the Po, languid and silted, have merely heaped up mud round this southernmost lagoon of Comacchio, closing it from the Adriatic and turning it, more and more, into swamp and shallow pool, with no deep channels across it, leaving it to slimy fish and malarious peasants, a shallow lake languidly polluting even that raging sea with the muddy waters of its one little outlet.

When we had turned our backs on the Adriatic at Magnavacca and were rushing along the miles of dykes connecting it with Comacchio, in mid-lagoon, and along the other miles, even longer, between Comacchio and the mainland, the misty skies gradually broke up and took colour, storm-

black and storm-gleamings; and a line of distant blue Apennine crests appeared southward, where the Ravenna pinewoods march with the swamps of Comacchio. And out of the shallow slate-blue waters, against those stormy slate-blue skies, there flashed out, like the lagoon-gulls, a flock of white distant towns, towers and steeples, Codigoro and Pomposa, which one's fancy filled with damp-stained basilicas slipping slowly into the marshes, their frescoes peeling off, their mosaics falling out, the horned sarcophagi around them sinking into the rank grass; places peopled less with their real poor fisherfolk than with the white-stoled martyrs and brocaded virgins, with kohl'd eyes like bayadères, of Ravenna and Torcello.

It was after this day at Comacchio that, hurrying back through those empty rice-swamps and pastures, we came upon the ramparts of Ferrara: their star-shaped bastions and avenues of planes, and their willow-grown moats separating this uninhabited country from the depopulated, invisible city. Passing under the gateway, those wide, straight streets of magnificent palaces and ample gardens, that whole, great town suddenly put to sleep at the height of its triumphant growth, is the only thing one could expect in that fertile, forlorn country and behind those mysterious ramparts.

XXX

WINTER DAYS AT RAVENNA

That Byzantine Bishop's throne in the church of St. Apollinaris has always charmed me as something strangely Greek. And now, returning to Ravenna after having been in Greece, it touches me still more with the remembrance of those theatre-seats among the dry grass of the Acropolis. Similarly to-day, looking over the Adriatic beyond these Ravenna marshes, the wintry sunny sea beyond the white pier-heads suddenly took a classic poignancy of charm: somewhere, beyond the sun's long trails of silver on the hazy water, somewhere out there, south-east, is Greece!

That first afternoon I bicycled the few miles which now separate Ravenna from the sea. After frost in the night (and thick snow on the Apennines) it was cold, but radiant; all things made of sunny aetherial blue. Just where the russet of the marsh begins, with the fringe of umbrella-pines, there advanced towards me up the canal a two-master, all sail struck, towed by three yoke of oxen, its beetle-green hull reflected in the blue water. The long white road was solitary; only here and there a man with a dog

and a gun; and where a distant pond drained through the marsh into the canal some men were watching eel-pots, like sunken boats, under a bridge. Also, when I got to that narrow belt of pines across the marsh, a man was hunting for truffles, following the scent of a shaggy black dog, and armed with a steel spud which flashed in the winter sunshine.

I walked the whole length of the stone canal-wharf, to where the wooden pier begins. The Adriatic was pure blue, faintly heaving beyond the narrow sands where the gulls fluttered and people were fishing for crabs. A big boat was going out, its great yellow sail bellied. I was sitting on the pier. I became aware that this sea outside Ravenna now means *Greece* for me. The Parian marble of the altar in San Vitale was brought across it, and the marble of the Bishop's throne of St. Apollinaris, shaped like that of the high priest of Dionysus.

How our imaginative emotions, our glimpses of the Genius Loci, multiply themselves like views in opposite mirrors! At Delphi and Olympia, two years ago, the bits of Byzantine carving among those classic ruins touched me more than anything else. And now, looking at the marble lattice-work, the slender crosses, outlined in green lichen, of these Ravenna churches, I see between them the amethyst rocks of Parnassus, the feathery maritime pines of Kronos' hill by the streams of Alpheus; and looking across the Adriatic this day of winter

sunshine, I feel Greece filling my soul like the aromatic scent of its sun-dried herbs.

It was not only Greece (for has such a Greece ever existed down there beyond the seas ?), but Elysium, in the pinewood of Classe those days of winter sun. We walked across its width, about a couple of miles beyond the forlorn church, along a canal reflecting the tall umbrella-pines. And then skirted along in the direction of Cervia, with its name telling of the stags whom Boccaccio's Spectre Hounds once hunted.

After the night's frost the ground was moist, yet hard, of vividest green moss tufted with thyme silvery and fragrant from the summer's singeing. We walked among the young pines, low and brilliant green, with the velvety domes of the taller trees patterning the sky inland. On the other side was the purply brown of the marsh, with wide ponds and streams reflecting the sky, and reeds where the grey cattle drank. In the distance was a ruined martello tower ; and beyond, on the horizon, yellow sails revealed the unseen sea.

But this Adriatic seaboard has wintry transformations. We drove, early one afternoon, towards Comacchio and that village of Sant' Alberto near which Garibaldi lurked in flight after his poor Annita's death. Sunshine ; the ponds and streams spilt over that marshland, a diaphanous blue ; and the fields of purply brown sedge, the russet haystacks and fringes of sere rice-straw and the distant belts of woods,

exquisite, like the veinings of a tea-rose against the sunny sky and azure mists.

At Sant' Alberto, a squalid little town (mean modern cottages gathered against one or two gaunt buttressed palaces), we found great excitement over an Anarchist's funeral (people in Romagna call themselves Anarchists, as they might Monarchists or Republicans !), with red banners and crape and municipal bands ; while the despised priest looked on from his church-step. We walked to the end of that little flat place, and climbed upon the embankment of one of the great canals of the Po. Across the dykes we could see the salt lagoon of Comacchio faintly bounded by sandbanks and poplars, and distant church steeples, white gulls flying over them ; an exquisite blue sunny vision.

But we had barely got half a mile on our way back to Ravenna when, with an icy breath, a wisp, a veil of fog suddenly drove towards us, making the sky supernaturally blue behind the poplar-belts ; and, in a few seconds, settling upon the marsh. Then came a struggle between that streaming icy mist and the afternoon sun, at first diminished to a mere bright wafer, then bursting through with unearthly glare, turning those marshy ponds into quicksilver, the waters among the reeds and the flowering sedge into the silver embroideries of witches.

We drove quickly along, through the icy drenching fog which blotted the whole country ; until, suddenly, its veil was left behind, and the

belfries and towers of Ravenna appeared against a fair frosty sky.

My last expedition, these winter days at Ravenna, was to see once more the Giottesque frescoes in that lonely church of Santa Maria in Porto, whose Byzantine belfry is said to have replaced the harbour lighthouse of the days when Roman galleys rode at anchor where now stretch reclaimed fields and rice-marsh.

The priest, a hunchback, was standing in the fitful sunshine by the church-door, and offered to do us the honours of that forlorn place. Having shown us over that extraordinarily venerable and touching little church, Byzantine but ended off in Gothic, ogival yet with the squatness of the dark ages, and all corroded (even its poor little tinsel Madonna) by damp and incalculable neglect, he took us to see his mother and sister. The presbytery was across a bit of former cloister given over to poultry, a splendid pure white turkey figuring as fairy villain in that poor place, and retreating wrathfully into the kitchen. Such a poor, poor little house, stocked with broken furniture, it seemed, and rags.

But there was nothing pathetic, rather an odd humorous heroism about the inhabitants. You should have seen the splendid old peasant-mother and the stalwart sister, sitting opposite the priest, telling us stories of his dealings with his ill-conditioned Socialist parishioners, as if he had been a mailed and vizored mediæval

warrior-prelate, rather than a poor little deformed creature, worn and parched by fever, malarial anæmia, and poverty, presiding over a dozen farms scattered between Ravenna and the sea, in this recently reclaimed marsh below the neighbouring river level. He had intelligent dark eyes, and a resolute, laughing mouth. Indeed, he and his womankind contrived to get a lot of good-humoured—and, what was stranger —dignified laughter out of all their misfortunes : the threats of the self-styled "Anarchists," who never came to church except when some head of cattle was ill ; the stealing of the parochial hay and cheating over the parochial faggots ; the neglect of the authorities—nay, even the fever and rheumatism. Those three, mother and brother and sister, were somehow folk apart, and in their heroic cheerfulness superior to evildoers and elements. The mother had brought *vin sauto* and glasses into the priest's study, and we sat for a long time between the piles of mouldering books and the sewing-machine, listening to the stories of the marsh and its godless farmers. What was delightful was the total absence of any hypocritical mansuetude towards the parishioners : if they preferred to die like beasts, averred the priest's sister, let them please themselves, "padroni loro——"

And, by some inexplicable accident in the history of that poor family's scant furniture, the study where these plucky and racy people entertained us was presided over not only (as

usual) by the crucifix on the priest's desk, but, on a shelf above the bunged-up fireplace, by a little Buddha of jade. Did the two spirits of gentleness unite to infuse a double dose of self-respecting humorous courage into these, the owners of their effigies ?

When we had thanked and said good-bye we passed again through the church ; there was something inconceivably droll in all those Giottesque lords and ladies and saints and angels in the fresh blue and pink of the newly uncovered fresco. Mediæval persons of quality, all beautiful and beautifully dressed and beautifully mannered, smiling and languishing with their pink and white faces and almond eyes, in the last gleam of winter sunlight. Francesca da Rimini, it is said, is one of them, with an embroidered hem and a green garland. And alongside is that priest's family, struggling cheerfully with rags, and fever, and godless Socialists, in the tumble-down house below the level of the river-bed.

XXXI

THE BLIND SINGER OF SATURNIA

I HAD been suffering, all these days of return to the Maremma, from the lack of that human element which should bring to a focus and personify the impressions of these lush pastures and aromatic hillsides and endless woods, where nightingales sing in the pink oak-leaf and blossoming may, and where the great black-faced cattle browse among the overblown asphodels.

Why was there no ruined tower for Dante's Pia—"Siena mi fe, disfecemi Maremma"—by the little lake deep in the forests, from whose rushes rose the cry of the bittern, and over which circled great hawks in the blue emptiness?

The people who once lived here are too remote; their memory has crumbled to nothing, like the handfuls of bones and the scraps of bronze in their long-rifled tumuli among the woods. The Middle Ages have left only names, and sometimes nameless coats-of-arms on the battlemented walls of the villages. We do not even know the real name of that ruined abbey overgrown with acanthus nor the name of the saint

to whom its finely set ashlars and capitals carved with boars' heads were once dedicated.

The dead, in the Maremma, are too dead. And the living are not sufficiently alive: those poor, fever-dulled people of the black mediæval towns, littering even their church-steps with ordure, and those shepherds who thrust hundreds of sheep every evening into the dark wattled mazes where the few drops of milk are squeezed out of ewe after ewe, looking like priests of some earth-worship at their savage primæval rites. It is all very unhuman, this solemn and beautiful South Tuscan seaboard. And the Genius of Places is, after all, largely the spirit of a region's inhabitants, present or past.

I was making this reflection yesterday afternoon while dressing for our last ride through the myrtle and lentisk thickets, when the Prince's grand-daughters knocked calling me to come and hear a blind man who was playing the accordion for the servants. It proved to be no accordion at all, but a superior instrument of the concertina sort. It had cost a hundred francs, and been subscribed for by the people of the blind man's native town, a little mediæval place which we see inland, impregnable on its travertine ridge high above the forests. So the blind musician told us. He was seated in the whitewashed room where the bailiffs and upper herdsmen eat, alongside the castle kitchen. He was seated against the wall on a straw-bottomed chair, his stout cowhide boots with

yellow elastic sides tucked under the bars, and hunched up over his instrument: a man of no definable age, tall and thin, in an old velveteen shooting-coat and washed-out rose-coloured shirt. I noticed his figure and clothes first, and next his extraordinary hands, long and narrow and brown, with claw-like fingers as of an old paralyzed person, but moving with delicate nimbleness upon the concertina keys. And I did so because I instinctively avoided his poor face, furrowed—washed away, as it were—by small-pox; and particularly the dreadful empty holes where eyes should have been. But as he bent over his concertina and played a dance tune with perfect rhythm and a tone as of rustic pipes, I became aware, almost without looking (for the knowledge of that ravaged face and those terrible sockets prevented me), that he had a beautifully set-on and shaped head, and an expression, now caressing his instrument, now uplifted towards us, which was in itself a glance: a look more tender and more fiery than the rest of us could muster with all our pairs of seeing eyes.

The girls, in their rough riding clothes, were seated on the dining-table, which had been pushed into a corner, and the castle servants and the Sunday crowd of herdsmen and foresters and cheese-makers and hedgers and what all, crowded round the door, and in the passage, overflowing into the kitchen, with the shuffle and buzz which is the Southern way of being

silent. There was a clear space in front of the musician, but the upper servants were too fine to dance, and the other folk far too shy; until there suddenly entered a dreadful masquerade figure, later identified as the house carpenter, with a sham hump beneath tattered clothes and a soot-painted face under a battered hat, who began capering and mouthing in caricature of the charcoal-burners on the estate. It struck me that it is a harrowing, though perhaps consoling, peculiarity about poor folk, as it doubtless was about our mediæval ancestors, thus to get a horrid humorous pleasure out of their own squalor and old age and deformity. Be that as it may, the make-believe charcoal-burner jumped and gibbered; so the blind musician, enlightened by the thumps of his heels and his stick, struck up the tune of a *trescone*, to which the black bogy whirled and leaped with more grace than expected, forcing out as a partner one of the many grandmothers usual in an Italian country house, an old cook-woman who faced him and spun round until she was incensed by his attempt to snatch a kiss from her octogenarian cheeks. The merriment all seemed rather ungainly and gruesome. The concertina meanwhile was playing that old-fashioned dance-tune something like our hornpipe; but the quick-beating rhythm and long quavering passages, made me think somehow of the transfigured bagpipe-dances in certain old Italian violin sonatas, of Corelli and of Porpora.

Then he began playing a waltz; and the womankind remaining coy (by this time Donna Eleonora had also been fetched downstairs), the chief hedger, who is also our outrider on longer excursions, coupled with the smith, began to spin slowly and conscientiously round, with black hands on broad fustian shoulders. It was evident that the company did not want to dance, but merely to listen to the music. It was even more evident that the blind man was no ordinary strolling player, but a self-taught virtuoso and composer of no mean degree, whose brown, claw-like fingers squeezed out exquisite sylvan sounds with incomparable masterly *brio*.

And when, a guitar having been borrowed from the kitchen and tuned with scrupulous lengthiness, he preluded with some strange and beautiful flourishes, and fell to singing what he called the "Lament of the betrayed mountain girl," it became, moreover, evident to one at least of his hearers that he was no ordinary . . . well, no ordinary creature of any sort.

But before speaking more fully of the blind musician I must mention that he was attended by another half-blind person, whose appearance for some time diverted my attention from even his playing. It was just after that dreadful bogy of a carnival charcoal-burner had begun his caperings that my eye was caught, among the people by the doorway, by an apparition which I at first took for some far more successful masquerade: the face of an old woman,

surmounting a black shawl and hooded with a black kerchief, so pale that I thought it was whitened with flour; a face with features so regular, in a way so beautiful, as to suggest a tragic mask; moreover, with the eyes and temples entirely hidden beneath great black wire spectacles. Although a moment's reflection persuaded me that none of the good folk at the castle could have staged a figure so weird and so beautiful, it did not at first seem likely that a real human being could look as much like a raven and at the same time like a sibyl.

The old lady—for it was an old lady and no inexplicable tragic mask, coryphaeus of some tragedy of doom, leader of some mysterious, terrible chorus of blinded captives—the old lady presently came out of the doorway, and, seating herself next to the musician, received his concertina when he took the guitar; and, clasping it on her knees like a cinerary urn, sat infinitely silent and motionless through all the rest of his performance. She was, it turned out, his "Màmma," the half-blind leader of the blind along the forest paths and pasture tracks of this desolate Maremma.

The blind man, meanwhile, had begun singing: a long, long, sentimental ballad interspersed with dialogue and cut by lyric intermezzos of the sort called "rispetto," snatches of vocative beginning usually with the name of a flower. I had become accustomed to his being a real musician; the splendid rhythm and bagpipe wildness of

his concertina dance, and that fine tuning and fanciful preluding on the borrowed guitar, had left no doubt possible. And I confess to having experienced an absurd, painful expectancy of anti-climax as soon as he prepared to sing. For of all sickening musical creatures, an Italian street-singer, with his blatant tremolos and shameless out-of-tune vocal nudity, is to me far the most sickening; better a Paris singing-beggar, all cut-off words and no notes; better a London ballad-singer, with neither notes nor words whatever, than the warbling tenors and brazen basses, mouthing foolish sentences, of the Grand Canal and the hotel windows of Naples. So I watched for a gap in the group by the door. But the very first notes reassured and arrested me. The man's voice was not great, and he by no means put it all out. But what there was came with dead-in-tune and free-throated cleanness, like pure water out of an ample-mouthed vessel. It was a baritone, or, rather, a low tenor; however, one had not the impression of this or that kind of voice, of high or low, or, indeed, of voice as voice, but (as is surely the case with all fine singing) of voice as the audible bodily manifestation of a singing soul, the incarnation of music in an individual throat; and the illusion, which happened this time to coincide with the reality, that the voice was making the melody, that the singer was largely improvising for sheer pleasure in his voice. Similarly, when he paused and looked

round (for he *did* look with his empty sockets) the charming harmonies, and odd, amusing *grace-notes* seemed to invent themselves under his hooked fingers on that kitchen guitar. It was evident, as he sang on and on, interspersing his pieces with little ironical speeches, that he was doing so for his own satisfaction, and that the more he went on the less he could stop ; the charm of his music and of his whole person being the deep and varied joy with which he sang. His face was more radiant than I have ever seen that of any other performer whatever. And here I should explain that after a short while, and so soon as I had got over the terror of that small-pox ravage and those put-out eyes, the blind musician's face had fascinated me. It was clean-shaven, or thereabouts, with short, loose hair ; and the furrows of the pock-marks gave it not the horror of disease but something of the nobility of a weather-worn antique ; absurd though it sounds, that blind beggar made me think of such a Grecian head as one sees, with trickling laurel-boughs above it, in the hedge of a Roman garden ; and, at the same time, of Houdon's wonderful bust of Gluck. But there was something of cunning and violence also in the crooked mouth and well-set jaw ; he must have been no easy charge for the tragic masked "Màmma" to guide through the mountain villages and wattled shepherds' huts of this country of herdsmen and outlaws. A rustic Marsyas, a poet might have said,

stricken blind, as well as flayed by some envious Apollo, who had given him a Gorgon face, but which could not be deprived of its radiance and ironic charm; a crafty and savage creature of the woods and pastures, not without kinship to the beasts, but undoubtedly of a breed that is divine. Perhaps, without metaphor, of the race of those wonderful Italians of the seventeenth century, Vettori or Stradella or Pistocchi, who were singers and fiddlers and composers and actors, the earliest makers of Italian music, those who gained Italy that fame for musical genius which, when we meet it lingering nowadays, is apt to bring us up short with astonishment.

"Salve magna parens frugum, Saturnia tellus, magna virum." That verse of Virgil's has been running in my head all the time of our last Maremma ride, through the lentisk and myrtle scrub, and the heather taller than a horse, after the performance of the blind beggar in the servants' dining-room. Probably because one of his ballads, of which he gave us the printed sheet of words made by himself, was the lament of a girl whose lover had been killed by lightning, and the girl was of a village up one of these valleys, and the name of the village was *Saturnia*. Saturnia! A name to conjure with! But emotion will conjure with lesser names; and that blind musician had stirred me very deeply. There is, of course, something bound to move one in a poor tramp, blind from the cradle; and

how much more if he evidently pours out his whole viewless soul in music of his own making or remaking! Besides, I do not mind saying that there is something which goes straight to one's primæval and, so to speak, one's bodily soul—one's heart, as our fathers rightly called it—in just such music as his: pleasant, singable intervals and easy rhythms, poor stuff enough, no doubt, and which does not call upon the constructive sense all greater music appeals to, but catches one—how?—only the more, carrying along on the stream of a pure human voice all the random seeds of emotion dispersed into barrenness by daily life, and the memories and cravings which we give no heed to, making them flower in strange floating gardens—Adonis gardens of a moment—on the flowing surface of such song.

Saturnia! the name which Virgil gave to all Italy. And the name which half a dozen maps and guide-books, a few score illiterate peasants, now give to a poor little village of this emptiest of Italian provinces. Saturnia: some hillside heap of walls scarcely to be told afar off from the rock and the rubble; some trickle of mediæval lanes, black as from the burnings of feudal warfare of Aldobrandeschis and Orsinis; perhaps with a brave front of battlements and turrets, and at the end of its tortuous, oozy street, a sudden view through a gateway, a cypress tapering against green pastures and blue mountains, or capes and islands, rocky and azure, like

Aegina and Salamis, above the silver of olives as huge and hoary as those under which Plato once held converse by the Kephissus-bed. Saturnia. For anything I know, the man may have been born and bred there; certainly he had often climbed up its steep track for fairs and weddings and saints' days. That was *his* Saturnia, which he sang about. And then there is Virgil's, *magna parens* not of crops and herds only, the great black-faced bullocks ploughing in long teams in the flat river valley, the heifers raising their moon-shaped horns above the aromatic thickets; but *magna parens virum*, mighty parent of those men who were second only to Hellas; Saturnia mother, venerable and glorious mother, of poetry and song. And surely that blind beggar with his accordion was her rightful and not disinherited son.

XXXII

THE FALSE VETRALLA

In the Maremma lately, sitting after dinner drowsy from our long rides in the brushwood, I had been, not reading, but looking over, dreaming over, Dennis's "Etruria." It has the charm of travel when travel was difficult and remote (as in "Eothen," for instance), and undertaken only by people with some love of adventure, people ready to ride and walk, but doing either not for exercise but for love of strange wonderful places. And the charm of this book is heightened for me by the absurd illustrations, elaborate, amateurish, romantic, such as our grandmothers brought back in sepia or two-chalks, on tinted paper; views resembling nothing that ever did or could exist, but in whose woolly trees and cardboard rocks a creature with a heart feels the heart-beats of that half-hour by the ruin or the bridge snatched from an impatient "Vetturino"; and also of the many half-hours later, when, through long years, the tissue-papers were turned back from those pictures of the distant land which the traveller should never revisit. Dear brown romantic monstrosities, born of *mésalliance* of *Keepsakes* with Salvator (pronounced Sal*vata*)

Rosa; works of art eminently of aunts and of dowagers (I bethink me of some in my mother's old home, and of a Bedfordshire dower-house lined with the works of a long deceased Juliana Countess of) yet with a disconcerting kinship to Turner; records of pre-railway travel, how greatly I love you! And how, mostly for the sake of such, I loved that Dennis's "Etruria," turning over its pages in the whitewashed dining-room in the Maremma.

Loved with the love which is all pangs and longings: for beyond those hills we had seen, above the endless myrtle and heather high to the saddle, in hopeless blue distance, was there not that hidden Etruscan Hinterland I seem fated never to visit? Sovana, Saturnia, Ferentino, and so forth, that country, feeling so mysterious and unattainable, between Siena and Rome, a country of caves and tombs and oakwoods, and feudal fastnesses.

Among these names which quite at random, and irrespective of their importance in the book itself, haunted my fancy and conjured therein, was, foremost among many, Vetralla. By the mere accident of its sharp sonority and suggestion of glass, and its initial syllable telling of antiquity, *Vetustas*, Vetralla became one of the places I got to long for during those drowsy evenings over Dennis's book.

And suddenly, yesterday, there I was rushing, in the swift lucid dream of my friend's great

motor-car, through that very country. And, behold! here was Vetralla!

It was *not* as mere fact, but it should have been; and, having given me the pang of pleasure under that mistaken name, it will remain henceforward connected therewith in my mind, despite the circumstance that it was really (and mistakenly!) called Veiano by the maps and its inhabitants, and that we passed through the ostensible Vetralla further on, in a different and most unsuitable landscape. This false—for I suppose it must be considered as false—Vetralla, mine and not other indifferent people's Vetralla—appeared all of a sudden as we emerged out of the first woods of the southern Ciminian slopes, those Ciminian woods of which the poet Pascarella, who seems to have heard it told direct by the Ancients, tells me they were full of wizards in Etruscan days. The country was indefinably odd, in a way no words can tell; for you are not telling its strangeness in mentioning a winding, shallow gorge between dark brown volcanic escarpments, tufted at this season with budding broom. And in this country it is set as a mural crown of dusky russet houses with roofs lichened over the very yellow of that broom on the rocks. Anyway, the most mysterious earthborn little place you could imagine, as if only half human, built by goatfooted creatures or centaurs in that wild country, or as if turning back to rock and scrub after centuries of being lost, forgotten by the

world of living men. It appeared again above a torrent and a Roman bridge. And we dashed under its battlemented walls, and into its square, which, it being Whit Sunday, was full of decent-looking country folk and soldiers in parade uniform. And yet I feel as if no one save myself has ever really been there. What other people may have seen—those inhabitants and any casual travellers—is certainly not the real place which I saw.

And this to me remains Vetralla, Home of Etruscan Lucumos, some of whom lie, believe me, with gold-plate armour thin as the dead leaves shed by oakwoods over them, and laurel wreaths of beaten gold, and gold death-masks for faces, somewhere in the brown volcanic rock of that shallow gorge, ready to fall to dust and vanish in thin air when those who gaze at them shall take a new breath.

XXXIII

THE SCOTTISH PRINCE ON THE APENNINE TOP

It happens sometimes that one has, rather than delight at the time, the immediate sense that a locality is going to haunt one. And this premonition of its growth in memory and fancy I had that day at San Pellegrino, and on the way back, feeling, along with the weariness and the desire to be back home, an imaginative clinging to these places I did not wish to stay in. This expectation has come true. That whole mountainous region—the upland slopes of Sant' Anna, where people were reaping the pale Alpine corn against the sky-line, or threshing it behind the black stone cottages and byres marked by scant fruit-trees and red-berried rowans—all these oddly northern remotenesses tucked away beneath the scrub beech-woods which girdle the sunburnt Apennine summits—has already become a country of dreams and desires in which my thoughts linger as in the hill-pasture districts of Auvergne, the Cotswold slopes of the Colne and Windrush, and the hidden valleys, all milk and honey, of the Bernese Jura; thinly peopled regions meaning

openness to sky and safety from the madding crowd, high, hidden, and as if securely locked into one's thoughts.

Through these shallow, high-lying Apennine valleys the road to San Pellegrino winds with a steady, easy ascent, forgetful of the gorges and precipices lower down, open to the sun and air, ever facing the distant sweeps of mountain chains; deserted; mile after mile with never a cart, and crossed at most by the cows passing from one subtle field to another, or the sheep coming out of the beech-scrub to drink in the rills flowery with Parnassus daisy. Rising higher and higher, you are told by a cross-road, almost under the rocky ridge tawny with autumn bilberry, that it goes on the one side to Sassuolo, the far-off, already Lombard, hunting-palace of the d'Estes; on the other, to the Tuscan frontier at Turrite Cava, a cleft in the marble mountains whence the eagles look down on the Mediterranean. Everything up here seems far, far off, even the places the roads lead to!

A mile higher up is the pass of the Radici, the highest, I believe, that these Apennines boast. A rough stone inn among meadows and beech-woods, a mere black, shutterless cube, with a fringe of wind-warped beeches, might be somewhere above the Tyne or Tweed, but for the mules and the stacked charcoal sacks surrounding it. At this lonely place we left the gig, and took a charcoal-burner to guide us to the sanctuary

of San Pellegrino. We climbed with him along a track, roughly paved and as full of loose stones as a watercourse, through the beech-scrub and the bilberry; the rough hornbeam hedge parapetting it from the precipices was set at intervals with sad little broken shrines. A turn of the path, and in a gap of this hedge there suddenly appeared a great wave-like blue Carrara-peak. Another hundred yards along that stumblesome track, where a half-idiot beggar sits under a bush in wait for the pilgrims returning from the shrine with paper flowers in their hats—a fresh turn, and the rough paved track, now grown level, seems suddenly to come to an end, cut short between that wind-warped hedge and the slope of orange bilberry. And where it ends in mid-air, opposite, with nothing visible between, behold, the whole chain of the Marble Mountains: peak and jag and crag and crest, ascending, twisting, like a band of pale-blue flames against the blazing autumn sky.

They are, these Carraras, more than any other mountains I have seen, mysterious even in their unshrouded aerial splendour; formed all of air and light in shapes as of fire; isolated from every other range; born of other race, not slowly denuded into shape by frosts and rains, you would think, but, risen like a chain of breaking waves into the sky out of the sea; shining sea-gods, linked and embraced and reclining against the blue sunlight as the wave-crests recline upon the blue of the waters.

There is something droll and yet somewhat uncanny in the meeting of this godlike company of mountains and the two mummies in brocade and silver, displayed in the dreary black church of pilgrimage; flyblown pilgrims' inns and flyblown pilgrims' huckster-stalls of rosaries and paper flowers all round. There is no village, no barn or stable, not a tree or a bush; and there are no inhabitants save the priests, the rosary-vendors, and wineshop-keepers, living off the piety of the peasants who have scrambled up the mountain short-cuts and along that mule-track on the crest. It is a grim, filthy little place built round those two mummies in their gilded glass coffins, who have come, one wonders why or whence, to profane, rather than to sanctify, that pure rocky shrine of the winds and clouds, unconscious, those two saints like their hucksters and publicans, of the immortal glory spreading opposite.

We bought the penny life of Saint Peregrine, with an illustration showing him assaulted by "Fra Diavolo" robbers in sugar-loaf hats, a poem on sale between Decameronian booklets and the rhymed chronicles of the brigands Tiburzi and Musolino. There is something drolly disconcerting in the fact of that mummied saint, venerated along with another (added, perhaps, for symmetry, and suggestively named Saint Blank) on that Apennine crag, being described as a son of the King of Scotland.

One wonders by what chance he has really

come to be there, that Saint Peregrine. The suspicion arises whether the dried-up corpse, miraculously discovered in the sixteenth century in a hollow beech-tree among those rocks, may not have been that of some smuggler or outlaw skulking among those fastnesses where so many principalities once marched together: dominions of Este and of Malaspina, commonwealths of Florence and of Lucca. Or may it not have been—who knows?—merely some village idiot, like that poor boy squatted begging along the road, who had strayed after the sheep and perished among the mountain mists? Or is it really some early anchorite, some follower of St. Columba, perhaps, whose grave should have been in the heather of the Hebrides or alongside the hazels of some Irish wishing-well, but whom a fate propitious to Tuscan innkeepers and hucksters had led above the woods and precipices to figure as stage-king in that musty black church, in purple and tarnished silver, with an imperial crown of tinsel set down, in that glass coffin, alongside of his skeleton feet in silver-braided shoes?

Whichever he may really be, the situation reminds me of the story of that dead Anchorite of Tiberius' villa, sent in the eighteenth century to England in lieu of an English squire who had died at Capri; the holy man from the South now reposing in a family vault in Norfolk or Essex!

But San Pellegrino remains in my mind rather

as the sanctuary of those divine marble mountains; pale-blue, luminous Titans arisen out of the sea, and reclining together, at ease, but watchful and braced like the other gods who became once more marble rocks themselves, of some great temple gable open to the sun and storms.

XXXIV

DIVINITIES OF TUSCAN SUMMER FIELDS

The first incident of the Tuscan summer is the transformation, or, rather transfiguration, of the small children. Speaking prosaically and with regard to mere facts, what happens is that they are divested of all upper garments and, what is more to the point, of shoes and stockings. But for the eye and fascinated heart and fancy, a brand-new race appears miraculously from nowhere: tiny boys and girls in that succinct garment, waistcoat and breeches in one, fastened in the back with missing buttons, which reduces sex to a matter of a ribboned top-knot more or less; Gesù Bambinos and San Giovanninos and Santi Innocenti for Donatello and the Della Robbias; cupids, *putti*, baby fauns for the more pagan Raphaelesques and followers of Correggio, all suddenly there, like the flowers which appear after a day of showers and sunshine; little moving flowers themselves, flexible, tender, fluffy, rosy, pearly, golden-brown, with indescribable loveliness of brilliant, weather-stained rags, suddenly arising (by that magic rite of diminishing raiment) out of the cobbles of

slums and the dust and litter of roadside hamlets.

The marvel is greatest in such squalid surroundings; but the right place for these creatures is, of course, the fields. Several times of late I have met in the grass lanes between the spaliered vines, infant processions mimicking the Corpus Christi magnificences of their elders: tiny children, dressed out in garlands, carrying banners of leaves and trailing wreaths and streamers and discarded tins and pipkins, drumming and fifing on imaginary instruments and hymning in shrill, sweet tones to rustic divinities, immanent in blossoming grapes and wheat-in-the-ear and in budding baby souls.

Speaking of Corpus Christi has brought me, of course, to the second episode in the Italian summer's enchantment. It is, so to speak, the sanctification of evening. Suddenly, after the first hot days, you become aware of a new blessedness in the world; and the hour after sunset becomes holy in the fields, in the rustling valleys, like the summer duskiness of Italian churches, when the glow of the square is filtered through the black door velarium bellied with the draught like a great sail, and the cool air is fresh with the flowers stacked up on the altars. But the sudden coolness of the fields, the twilight beryl of the sky, the revelation to the taste and the nostrils of all the green, wet lushness hidden by day, of all the grasses which blossom in unseen trickling places, the dusk of the fields is not merely

holy, like that of the churches ; it is something more, divine, with the strange solemnity of the pagan gods of the soil.

And once, I remember, the dusk took living shape, the divinities stood revealed. It was at the close of a burning day which had brought fever to me, and that languor which will make relief into happiness, and happiness into rapture. The sun had dipped behind the hills, leaving the distant valley of Florence luminous, when we got with our cart to the first flanks of Morello, its peaks dim, distant. Among the little cypress-woods in the ineffable freshness we met some big white calves browsing up-hill. Then they came down, following their mothers along a stream-bed, and stopped upon the soft turf to bite at the white acacia-blossoms, which they resembled ; a sort of emanation of the pale, green coolness, with their quiet, gentle movements and almost diaphanous whiteness. We tied up the cart and walked a little way up the ravine, across the grass ; and there we found more white calves and heifers on the steep hillside, feeding among the flowering broom above the stream, where the nightingales whistled. One quite understood mythology, the stories of Europa and Io : these creatures might so well have been gods.

About two months after that undressing of the children of which I have spoken as suddenly peopling Italy with cupids and baby St. Johns, there comes the disrobing of the ground and its transfiguration through the wheat-harvest. How

often has it come upon me with surprise, this sense of relief, of a new world following on the steps of the reapers! The tree-trunks and roots, the vine-branches become suddenly visible, and the earth reveals itself, dry, pale, and almost disembodied in the sheen of stubble. And then all that much space, air, view, gained! One misses, indeed, the sweetness rising from the cornfields at evening. But how far greater the deliciousness of their being open to breeze and light, of their long gleams and shadows, their rosiness on which the light lies golden, the shadows cut sharp and cool. And then the freedom of walking over the stubble, of seeing the other crops, young maize and beans and sorghum, noting for the first time the little green apples on the trees that bend over, and the grapes, still minute, but quite shapely. One watches the oxen ploughing once more between the vine-garlands in the wonderfully sweet twilights, when the sawing of the cicalas meets for a moment the far gentler, but shriller, note of the crickets: the two voices of the Italian summer, so oddly suited, one to the blazing, relentless day, the other to the gentle and friendly night.

With all these sounds and sights are connected my earliest impressions of Bagazzano, a half-dismantled little villa, perhaps once a Medicean shooting-box or fowling-house, among the thin ilexes and cypresses of a solitary ridge looking down on the Arno. It was mainly the im-

pression, so unexpected in that high, remote place, of some wonderfully beautiful stuccoes on the outer wall of the tiny villa's tiny chapel: great candelabra and baskets of flowers in delicate film-like relief on a ground of worn-out vermilion, half-effaced in parts, with the exquisitely modelled limbs, the still more fascinating mere shadowy outlinings, of two crouching Michelangelesque nudes, a youth and a sylvan goddess, their slender thighs and strong bent backs doubled and twisting like tree-trunks and flower-stems; figures which seemed to come and go on that weather-beaten wall with the moving shadows and gleams and one's own delighted imagination. The chapel among the ilexes has no vestige of Christian emblems; nothing but those pagan candelabra, masks, birds, and flowers and Michelangelesque supporters; and, instead of cross, two little stone obelisks, which time or some hidden symbolical intention has curved towards one another into something like horns, such as are supposed to ward off the evil eye.

One fancies that this must have been the retreat of some paganizing philosopher of the late Renaissance. He would have built that chapel in the ilex-grove, at a stone's-throw from the villa portico, as a resting-place for all that he knew and all that he cared should remain of him,

> *Nobis, quum semel occidit brevis lux,*
> *Nox est perpetua una dormienda—*

with what goes before and follows symbolized in

those flowers and masks and fruits, and the pair of sylvans outlined on the worn-off vivid vermilion.

Be this as it may, and whether there was ever at that villa such a person and whether such were his opinions or not, we walked down from Bagazzano with things better than fancies and verses, even by Catullus, filling our hushed and delighted minds : the ineffable sweetness of hour, season, and place, the blessedness of the past heat of day and coming cool of night, the ripeness of air among herb-grown rocks, its freshness in the deep green of the trickling watercourses.

XXXV

MONTE ARGENTARIO OR THE MAN WHO SLEPT IN THE TRAIN

Beyond Civita Vecchia there comes into sight —or, perhaps, only into my fancy—a double coned island, emerging from the luminous mist and the luminous white water, seen, as the train speeds along the coast, across fields of flowering asphodel, where the iron-grey bullocks are grazing.

My only fellow-passenger having emptied his pockets of a supply of fresh newspapers, and disposed of them carefully for later perusal, has pulled his cap over his eyes and settled to sleep in the opposite corner, leaving me alone with the Maremma landscape, which is spreading out and folding up and then unfurling again as the train speeds along. And I am glancing idly from it into my memory, and every now and then, where there is something I would clutch and keep, scribbling vain words in my diary (if one can speak of a diary where a single afternoon is concerned) of this journey to Pisa from Rome.

First there had been Palo : the sea of enamel violet, against grass powdered with daisies and

dwarf jonquils, and a martello-tower, telling of Saracen raids, seen through the smoke of burning weeds: the shore where, so long ago, we picked up, in the improbable black sands, antique marbles rolled by the surf into fanciful semblance of hearts.

Now, near Etruscan Corneto, stretched feudally with towers and walls above the olive yards, my eye and thoughts are caught by a flush stream flowery with catkins of willows and poplars. It must be the Marta; and my thoughts ascend its course to where it flows between the forlorn green hillocks under the deserted basilicas, carved like ivory reliquaries, of Toscanella.

But I am suddenly drawn back into the present. That island with the double cone—I see it now over a wood of big black cork ilexes sprayed over with flowering thorn—that island, as I suspected from the first, must be Monte Argentario. Yes. It is Argentario. Approaching Orbetello the mountain rises above a great salt-pond, fringed with dry sedge and pinewood. The sun is setting, and as it sets it wraps the mountain in its dim violet and russet mists and shadows. The railway runs inland, losing sight of the sea. Dusk steams up from the fields, and there is light only in the highest sky. Monte Argentario has become, once more, a mere memory.

[The dark seems to wake up my fellow-passenger. He raises himself in his corner, and,

switching on the nearest electric light, unfolds and sets to reading one after another of his many newspapers.]

It is ten years now that, staying inland in the Maremma, I was taken to Monte Argentario on one of the off-days of the boar-hunting. We went, more precisely, to Port' Ercole, a fishing place under the guns and glacis of a great fort built by Hapsburg Spanish kings. The object of interest was a fine botanical garden of sub-tropical plants, which a deceased Ricasoli, brother to the famous statesman, had made himself among the rocks above the little Genoese-looking harbour. But what remained in my memory was none of those rare plants, but the little house, recently empty of its solitary old proprietor. It was built and furnished in the 1850 style, surely one of the ugliest ever invented, but already pathetic in its recent, and yet so utter, pastness. Or, perhaps, what made me think so was its having remained exactly as the dead owner had left it, his paper-fulls of dried plants, his ugly little *souvenirs*, and odds and ends, all strewn about, his guns and swords (he had been a General and fought in all the wars of Liberation), and his little library of classics and books on botany and agriculture, exactly as he had left it all. And then the walls of the little rep-and-horsehair rooms were covered with the photographs of the heroic generation which—so few years ago and yet it feels in so remote a past! did the making of what was to become the

inglorious, jog-trot Italy of to-day. There they were, Charles Albert and Victor Emmanuel, and Garibaldi on his little white Arab, and Ricasoli, and Cavour and La Marmora, and Poerio, chin-bearded and moustachioed, in pegtop trousers, with appropriate ladies in *cachemires* folded in a point upon their valanced crinolines: the heroic women (such as Meredith drew) who sent their sons and husbands and lovers to die magnanimously in battle or at daybreak in prison-yards; or (worse almost) into foreign lands, whence—who knows ?—they might never, never return to Italy. And in the midst of these little brown, ungainly photographs and ghostly daguerreotypes there also hung prints of patriotic battles—Novara and Sanmartino and Montebello —so hideous and so venerable in their long-tarnished frames. What a gone, gone Past, this Italy of Stendhal's Duchess and Meredith's Vittoria! The bailiff sent in the usual tray of sweet Vin Santo and finger biscuits, and there was a great exchange of polite inquiries with the friends who had brought me. But I sat, so to speak, in the presence of the poor old dead General, who had slowly flickered away a once heroic life among his rare palms and cactuses and his flowers between sheets of blotting-paper, all alone on the remote little island off that malarious, deserted Tuscan coast.

For, to all intents and purposes, save that you get to it along a dyke from the mainland, Monte Argentario is the island nearest to shore of the

Tuscan Archipelago, and perhaps an island altogether when the Etruscans and their Phœnician and Greek customers came for the tunny that is fished there still, and for the silver to which it must owe its lovely and singularly fitting name. An island for the Odyssey, between the deep and violet Tyrrhene sea and the shallow salt lake of periwinkle blue; some Greek names still remaining, Port' Ercole and Talamone; and nameless mounds of lost Etruscan cities among the myrtle thickets of the surrounding capes. This promontory, as the guide-books call it, is an island also in the especial charm of completeness and independence which only islands have: a great double-coned hill, with sharp, rocky outline against the sky, and breaking into rocky creeks against the sea, but covered with scrub as with dark, silvery smoke, and widening into shallow valleys with little reed-propped vines, and big, big fig-trees, and fields of artichoke, and little walled-in gardens over-topped by tall lemon-trees, orchards scooped out among the lentisk and myrtle of the rocks, and big olive-trees also, where the rivulets, between high feathery reeds, go into the purply-blue sea; a wonderful, sweet, solemn, separate place, a little kingdom all to itself.

The sea about Monte Argentario is, however, not so beautiful as the shallow lake which separates it from the mainland, and in which steep the reddish cyclopean walls and Spanish forts of the little town of Orbetello.

We had our midday meal there, in the house of my friends' bailiff, where, in the office, above the shelves of ledgers, hang the photographs of three famous brigands of the neighbouring Maremma—Tiburzi, Ranuzzi, and another, in their goatskins and great cartridge-belts, erect, but dead, propped up on staves as the huntsmen prop up the wild boar which they have shot. The front of the bailiff's house was on the narrow street, the long hospital front, of the sad little malarious town. But the back windows open upon that wonderful pale-blue salt lake, where gulls and wild duck hover over the wattled nets, and big bullocks wade in the shallow water; in the foreground the jutting walls and bastions of the fortifications, even as in some classic landscape (with appropriate Latin distich in the engraving) by Claude or Vernet; and, beyond, the great island-mountain, unsubstantial and silvery in the winter sunshine, of Argentario.

That was ten years ago. And now I am travelling from Rome to Pisa, rehearsing it all as the train shifts those places in and out of sight. My only fellow-passenger, as I have said, is a man who has slept the whole time that there has been daylight and set to reading as soon as it grew dark. He strikes me as vaguely allegorical of so much travelling through the world, and also, even more, through life. For the electric lamps are inconveniently high up, the train is jolting as hard as it can, the print of those newspapers he is reading is certainly bad and the

telegrams will be contradicted to-morrow. Where as those hours of sunlight have sped along the Etruscan sea, among the asphodels of the pasture and the myrtle thickets of the hillsides ; and, as I have been saying, there has slowly come, vision-like, into sight, and slowly been blotted out by sunset mists, the double-coned island promontory of Monte Argentario.

And this parable of the Man Who Slept in the Train, brings us back to the lesson I have endeavoured to point, in my initial allegory of the " Tower of the Mirrors."

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